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A Daughter of the Ranges

BLACKIE & SON LIMITED

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TORONTO

A Daughter of the Ranges

A Story of Western Canada

BY

BESSIE MARCHANT

Author of "Rachel Out West"

"Three Girls on a Ranch" &c.

Illustrated by Arthur A. Dixon

BLACKIE & SON LIMITED
LONDON AND GLASGOW

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By Bessie Marchant

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Two on Their Own.
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Sylvia's Secret.
The Secret of the Everglades.
The Unknown Island.
The Youngest Sister.
Hilda Holds On.
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Molly in the West.
Di the Dauntless.
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Her Own Kin.
A Transport Girl in France.
No Ordinary Girl.
Rachel Out West.
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A Mysterious Inheritance.
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A Daughter of the Ranges.
Held at Ransom.
Greta's Domain.
Harriet Goes a-Roaming.
Hope's Tryst.



45 351

SHE TOOK HIS HAND IN BOTH HER OWN

Page 239

CONTENTS

CHAP.	Page
I. A REMINDER OF THE PAST	9
II. THE SEARCH	21
III. WHO FIRED THE GUN?	31
IV. WHY REVENGE?	43
V. THE SKIRTS OF HAPPY CHANCE	52
VI. AN IMPATIENT PATIENT	63
VII. FACING THE FUTURE	74
VIII. A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION	85
IX. THE COMING OF HELEN	96
X. THE ROUND-UP AT DRIFTWOOD CREEK	108
XI. BETTY'S JOURNEY TO TOWN AND WHAT SHE FOUND THERE	119
XII. A DROP OF BITTERNESS IN THE CUP	129
XIII. A WORRY FROM OUTSIDE	140
XIV. WHAT WOULD HE DO?	152
XV. GRIP ALDERSON'S CHAGRIN	163
XVI. HEARD AT THE DOOR	174
XVII. IN THE BY-WAYS	185
XVIII. PLEASANT DAYS	192
XIX. THE SHAFT THAT TOLD	205

CHAP.		Page
XX.	A DARK HOUR FOR HELEN	212
XXI.	THE NIGHT JOURNEY	227
XXII.	TOWARDS THE NEW DAY	235
XXIII.	A CONFIDENCE	250
XXIV.	TO AVERT A TRAGEDY	258
XXV.	THE GATHERING HOUR	273
XXVI.	A STRANGE HIDING-PLACE	283

ILLUSTRATIONS

Facing
Page

SHE TOOK HIS HAND IN BOTH HER OWN	-	<i>Frontispiece</i>	
HER MOTHER STAYED TO TALK ABOUT THINGS IN GENERAL			96
SHE CREPT FROM SHADOW TO SHADOW	-	-	152
A WORD CAUGHT HIS EAR AND PULLED HIM UP SHORT	-		184

A DAUGHTER OF THE RANGES

CHAPTER I

A REMINDER OF THE PAST

A NY person having in his possession the will of Giles Harper, deceased, of Beckington Villa, Canterbury, Kent, and dated 12th February, 1880, is requested to communicate with Messrs. Bawdrey & Nunn, solicitors, Canterbury, Kent."

"Why, that must be the very will that I witnessed when I was staying with old Giles just before I left England," exclaimed Reuben Mason in a tone of surprise, laying down his paper, and staring across the table at Caryl as if he supposed that she could make the mystery plain.

She rose from her place at the other end of the board, and came round to his side. "What have you found, Father, and what paper is it in—the *Western Press*?"

"No, child, it is the *East Kent Express*, and it is nearly a fortnight old already. It came with the letter from Bob Bellamy this morning. You know he often sends me a Kentish paper, just for old sake's sake, and because I like to see the familiar names."

"Poor dear Daddy! I really believe you are home-

sick for England still;" and she bent to rest her cheek for a moment in a caressing fashion on his hair, that already was so thickly sprinkled with gray.

He laughed, saying, with a nervous constraint in his tone: "Ah! but I guess I should be home-sick for Canada if I was to find myself dumped down in Old England, with my girls and their mother left behind here."

"I should hope you would," she remarked, as she stood with one hand resting on his shoulder, looking down at the paper. "But did Mr. Bellamy say anything about this missing will, Father?"

"Not he. I don't suppose that he even knew that old Giles and I were ever friends; for he—Bob Bellamy—did not go to Canterbury to live until ten years after I left England."

"1880! Why, that is twenty years ago! Has the will been lost all that time, do you expect; and if so, why did not the foolish man set to work to make another?" asked Caryl, going back to her place at table to continue her interrupted supper.

"Ah! that is more than I can say. Giles was always a slow, queer sort of a man, hard to move, set and obstinate as a donkey, but good at heart, as I had cause to know," replied Mr. Mason with a short sigh, as he pushed his plate away, then turned to the paper again.

"Was he kind to you?" Caryl asked, with a warm regard for the unknown deceased stirring in her heart; for she loved her father with a passionate devotion, and was prepared to like anyone who had ever done him a good turn.

"Ay, that he was. That very night I signed his will he gave me a hundred pounds to start with in the

new country. Perhaps I should not have remembered the will business so well but for that."

"Gave it to you! A free gift, do you mean, or a loan?" she asked in surprise.

"A gift, with only one provision attached to it," he replied slowly, and with a dreamy look in his face, as if the advertisement in the *East Kent Express* had stirred up a whole host of memories.

"What was the provision?"

"That if I prospered, becoming even moderately rich, I was to help someone else, for preference a young person struggling to get a start in life, to the extent of his gift to me. That is, donate them with a hundred pounds, just as freely as it was given to me."

"Have you done it yet?" she asked, her eyes shining, her face aglow, for this idea of passing a kindness on appealed to her romantic, generous nature.

"No, child, not yet. For one thing, I have never felt rich enough to spare so much money all in a lump; and for another, I have never yet happened upon the right person, either man or woman, to give it to."

"But you will, Daddy dear; I am sure you will. And when you do, you must make the same stipulation that was made in your own case, that some day, if prosperity follows, the kindness shall be passed on," she said eagerly.

"Supposing prosperity does not follow, what then?" he asked, with a humorous twinkle in his eye.

"I don't suppose it. Money given like that would be certain to carry prosperity with it," she retorted, laughing outright; and then, her meal coming to an end, she rose from the table and walked to the window, which faced the west, as the sun was sink-

ing like a ball of fire behind the Milk River Ridge of rolling hills, where the vast plain came to an end.

Mr. Mason was silent. He had pulled a pencil from his pocket, and was busy making notes on the various letters he had received, most of which would have to be answered in time for the outgoing mail in the morning, and that was Caryl's work.

"See here, child, this letter from Brown & Jones, Main Street, Macleod, must be, yes. Tell them the sixty grass-fattened steers shall be driven into their yards this day week for the price they quote, cash down."

"It is not a big price. I think they should have gone one more dollar per head," she said, coming to his side, and running her gaze over the letter she had to answer, frowning in a puzzled fashion over the notes on the margin made by her father's pencil, for the writing of Reuben Mason left much to be desired in the matters of clearness and legibility.

"No, it is not a big price; but their money is so prompt and sure that I can always afford to take a lower figure from them than from other people, who do not pay so quickly. Then you can drop a line to Lawton to say that I must have that saddle this week. I ought to have had it before now, for the one I am using is not safe, or wouldn't be if there came a bit of rough-riding. That is all, I think, to-night, except the cheque for Seymour & Hicks, which I have drawn ready; you will find it in my desk."

"Very well; I will get them all written to-night, I think, if Beulah does not want me to help her with the stores; then I shall feel free in the morning for whatever may turn up. But there is another letter here. Father, doesn't this want answering?" and she

held up a yellow envelope, directed in a sprawling hand to:

Mr. Reuben Mason,

Tentover Ranges,

Height of Land,

Nr. Lethbridge.

Mr. Mason's brow darkened, and quite a fierce look came into his genial, good-natured face.

"That is an anonymous letter; a pretty cool bit of impertinence it is too. If there is one thing I detest more than another, it is unsigned warnings and hints of evil shortly to befall."

"Still, if the evil is coming, it is as well to be prepared and on the look-out for it," she said, touching the yellow envelope with dubious fingers. "May I read it, Father?"

"If you like. I was inclined to stuff it behind the fire when I read it, only as there was none in the room I could not do it, so I read it again instead."

Caryl drew the enclosure from the envelope with disdainful fingers, for it was smeared and dirty.

"DEAR SIR" (so ran the letter), "You will be wise to keep a watch on the ninety-feet flume over Swallow Creek during the next few nights, or you may lose more water than is convenient, and be dry all summer, since holes are easier made than mended.

"A FRIEND."

"Oh, Father, what does it mean?" cried Caryl, with a pant of fear in her voice.

"It means that somebody has a grudge against me, and is going to knock a hole in my irrigation system at the point where it is likely to do the most damage, and take the longest time to repair. I wish I had a notion as to who the somebody is, and the situation would take on a pretty sudden change, I can tell you," he rejoined in a wrathful tone.

"Have you sent a warning to the police?" she asked, the colour dying out of her face, and leaving it white and drawn.

"No; and, awkwardly enough, it was only yesterday that I signed for young Frank Murray; so unless I send a special message, or Grip Alderson should chance round this way, I am not likely to see an official for a week or more," he replied with an air of vexation. "And the nights are cool for airing one's self on horseback in the small hours."

"I would send a special messenger, and send him to-night. It is only four miles to the telegraph office, and any one of the boys would gladly do that for extra pay," she answered with the brisk air of decision which always characterized her when serious business was to the fore.

"The morning will be soon enough. I must send into Lethbridge then, and the one journey will serve the double purpose," Mr. Mason rejoined, as he folded the English newspaper, putting it carefully away in his business desk, a rather clumsy deal structure, standing in the corner by the window.

"But there is to-night. How will you manage? Will you have a watch set?" she asked in a worried tone, for already the anonymous letter had got upon her nerves.

"Not a bit of it. I shall ride old Charley round

that way between one and two in the morning; and if there is anything to see, I shall be sure to see it. I shall not forget to take a revolver with me," he added in a significant tone.

Caryl shivered. "Don't go alone, Father dear; I shall be so worried!" she said plaintively.

But he only laughed, telling her she should have more courage, even if she were merely a girl. "Why night after night old Charley and I are out alone under the stars, or under the black darkness when no stars are to be seen; and we have never been afraid yet, neither the old horse nor I."

"That may be; but then you were not expecting an encounter with these flume-wreckers, if that is the proper title for them. I am sure Mother would not consent to your being out alone to-night; and in her absence I consider myself your mentor," she said with a saucy air.

"I dare say you do, Miss Impertinence. There are not many men as much tyrannized over by their womenfolk as I am; for when it isn't your mother it is you, and when it isn't you it is Betty, and when it isn't Betty it is Beulah Price," he said, with a comical air of resignation.

Caryl frowned. "Beulah does take a good deal upon herself at times; but she is so good and faithful that one scarcely likes to resent it."

"Yes, she is worth her money, which is more than can be said of all the hired help—Long Jim, for instance. But I am rather glad than otherwise to have a quiet ride to-night, even though it will be chilly, for I want to see how much I can recall of that old will of Giles Harper's; then I will write to Bawdrey & Nunn to tell them what I know, which,

though it may not be much, may still help them a little."

"Did you know what was in the will, then?" asked Caryl in surprise. "I thought the witnesses to a will were merely the witnesses to a signature."

"That is all in most cases, but in this instance the old man read the whole of it to me, and I helped him to reframe and modify some of the clauses. For example, I remember quite well he had left me a hundred pounds in his will, and when I pointed out to him that the fact of my being a witness would render the bequest to me invalid, he just gave me the money down, and that settled it. A very good thing it was for me, too, for, wanting that hundred pounds, I might have missed everything that was most worth having in life," he said, with a glance towards the portrait of a proud, handsome woman hanging over the mantel-piece.

Caryl nodded her head in silent appreciation. One of the reasons of her intense love of her father was his exceeding devotion to her mother, and the patience with which he bore with that lady's exactions.

The door was pushed open at this moment, and a rather tousled head was thrust in.

"Miss Caryl, can you spare ten minutes to help me with the stores? the lists clean beat me!" said the owner of the head, in a voice with a strong nasal intonation.

"I will come, Beulah," replied the young lady, but in no very pleased tone. For it was distinctly trying to be compelled to spend that hour of delightful after-supper leisure in muddling round the store-room, packing away bags of sugar and rice, packets of

currants and raisins, bales of hessian, and horse-flannel, chests of tea, and parcels of coffee-beans.

But when a thing had to be done, it was of no use making a fuss, and she had long since learned the secret of rendering herself useful in a domestic crisis, since by so doing she ministered to her father's happiness and comfort.

Hastily buttoning on a big useful holland pinafore, which reached up to her throat and down to her feet, she crossed the wide passage to the store-room, a long narrow apartment shelved from floor to ceiling, and just now in a wild confusion of bags, bales, and boxes; for it was the day for the quarterly intake of stores, and the consignment of goods had not arrived until late in the afternoon, much to the disgust of Beulah Price.

Caryl threw up her hands with a cry of dismay, the confusion was so much worse than she had expected to find, and the prospect of getting matters straight proportionately remote.

"What a terrible muddle! Can't it be left till the morning, Beulah?"

"No, it can't, Miss Caryl, not if my strength holds out to do it anyway; for every day brings its own work, and if you once get behind there's no catching up again, as I've found. Of course I can't get the things all put away straight, that will take the best part of a week, doing it at odd times. But I must get the lists checked. And they made the most dreadful mistakes this time, sending half a hundred-weight of table-salt and six pounds of butter-salt, instead of the other way about," said Beulah, as with much puffing and panting she hoisted a bag of Demerara sugar on to the scale; for it was not her way

to trust to the figures of the shop-people, and every bag, bale, and parcel received from the stores was duly weighed by this faithful servant, who made her master's interest her own.

Caryl went to her assistance, and together they settled the bag on the scale, registered the weight in the store-book, and compared it with the invoice.

Every separate item had to be treated in this fashion, and darkness dropped upon them long before the end of their task was reached. Caryl lighted a lamp, and hung it on a hook in the corner over the table where the invoices lay, as soon as it became too gloomy to see to write, and after that neither she nor Beulah noticed how the night was coming on, so absorbed were they in their task.

"There, that is all we need to do to-night, I think, and I'm not sorry, for I feel as if my arms would never leave off aching," Beulah said presently, sitting down on an old three-legged stool with an air of utter exhaustion.

"I am tired, I admit, but you must be utterly done up. Come out to the kitchen and let me make you a cup of good strong coffee, then we will lock the door on all this muddle until the morning." Caryl reached down the lamp as she spoke, to light the way to the kitchen, then cried out in surprise as the clock in the hall struck ten with a loud sonorous buzzing between each stroke.

"Ten o'clock already, and my letters not written! There is no light in the sitting-room, and no fire either by this time, I expect. I wonder if Father has come in yet?"

"You may be pretty certain that he has not, or we should have heard him calling for a light long ago.

Don't trouble about making me any coffee, Miss Caryl. I shall do well enough if I can just sit and rest. Supper is not cleared out yet, nor a thing put ready for the morning either," Beulah sighed with a despairing air as, the kitchen reached, they found the fire out and the stove growing cold.

"Oh! I shall make it, and have a cup myself; but there is no need to light the stove, I can make it just as well on the oil-heater. Tuck yourself up on the settle for ten minutes, Beulah, whilst I fly round. I have not worked half as hard as you have to-day." There was some self-reproach underlying Caryl's tone as she spoke, for her day had been pleasant and leisurely enough up to supper-time, whilst Beulah had toiled unremittingly since dawn.

Beulah made no reply, except to lay her weary head down on the one hard cushion of the roomy old settle. Just for a few minutes she was too tired to protest at this reversal of the proper order of things, and let Caryl do what seemed to her best.

Moving quickly, the girl lighted lamps here and there; one in the wide passage that cut the house in two and joined the front veranda to the back porch as by a covered way, one in the kitchen, and one in the sitting-room, where her father usually sat smoking and reading for an hour before going to bed.

Then she carried the lamp from the store-room into the dining-room, and commenced to clear the supper-table.

The little heap of letters lying on the desk in the corner by the window attracted her attention then, reminding her of the anonymous warning her father had received anent the wrecking of the flume, and a sudden fear seized her lest already he should have

started for the lonely valley of Swallow Creek, where the ninety feet of flume brought the water from the main canal on to the Tentover Ranch.

Hastily stepping out on to the front veranda, she strained her eyes and ears to discover if Charley, the old white horse, was in the little paddock close to the house. Failing to see or hear him, she whistled shrilly, a sure and certain signal, to which the old horse never failed to respond, being sagacious enough to understand that it always meant sugar, bread, or apples, or, what was better still, a banana.

But there was no answering neigh, only the moan of the night wind sweeping across the plain; and then, away in the distance, where the ground sloped towards Swallow Creek, the report of a gun, followed by a hoarse, pain-wrung cry in a human voice.

CHAPTER II

THE SEARCH

THE coffee-pot was bubbling furiously, and a most inviting aroma filled the big kitchen as Beulah started from a slight doze, shivering with mingled cold and weariness.

"The coffee will warm me," she said to herself as she rose from the settle, "and even if it should keep me from going to sleep I need not worry, for there is plenty I can do."

She poured out a cup, drinking it scalding hot, without sugar or cream, and was just going in search of Caryl, whom she supposed to be writing letters in the dining-room, when the door was dashed open, and Caryl rushed in with ghastly white face and dilated eyes.

"Oh, Beulah, Beulah, something has happened; I am sure of it! Father is out somewhere, Charley has gone from the little paddock, and I heard the report of a gun followed by a terrible cry over Swallow Creek way!" she panted.

"It was only Long Jim shooting rats, I dare say. A regular nuisance it is, since they have been getting a cent per tail for every kill from the master. I've heard them myself popping away night after night, till I've imagined that a whole horde of horse-thieves were at work on the ranch, and we all in danger of being murdered in our beds. Sit down and have

some coffee, Miss Caryl, for you look as white and scared as if you had seen a ghost." Beulah spoke confidently, and without misgiving, for she knew nothing of the warning letter, and Mr. Mason's absence at night was much too common to call for comment, since that wide ranch of nearly two thousand acres called for no small amount of over-looking both by night and day.

"But where can Father be?" cried Caryl, shivering still, for that ill-omened letter was uppermost in her thoughts, though loyalty to her father forbade her mentioning it even to Beulah. "And then the cry that followed the gun-shot, what could that mean?"

"Long Jim's gun kicked, and hurt him, I expect. Terribly unhandy with a shooting-iron he is for a ranchman, and more given to shrieking when he hurts himself than any man I have ever seen." There was lofty scorn in Beulah's tone as she spoke, for Long Jim, on his first settlement at Tentover, had shown himself rather disposed to make friendly overtures towards her, which she promptly resented, since when relations had been very strained between them.

"I wish I knew what to do, or that I had someone to send to look for Father," sighed Caryl, in dire perplexity as to what to do for the best.

"The master is very well able to look after himself, Miss Caryl; more so than most men, I should say. Do you go to bed, and I will fly round putting things a bit straight for the morning, for I feel about as wideawake now as if I'd been asleep all day; that is the best of a good cup of coffee."

"Or the worst, I should say; for after your long hard day of work you ought to be too sleepy to keep your eyes open. But I cannot go to bed until Father

comes in, Beulah, so I shall just sit down, and write those letters that have to be mailed in the morning," said Caryl, carrying her desk into the sitting-room, because it was brighter there than in the dining-room.

But the weird cry she had heard haunted her all the time she was writing, and when she came to the last letter, which chanced to be the saddler's, she rose to her feet with a sharp cry of pain. Her father had said that his saddle was not safe; suppose it had broken, and he in consequence had had a bad fall!

The thought was torture, and, flinging a cloak round her shoulders, she stepped out on to the veranda again, straining eyes and ears for some sign of his presence, or hint of his speedy return.

But no sound came to her out of the silence, except the moaning of the wind as it swept across the plain, and the soft, subdued lapping of the water against the flood-gate in the home canal. Then a night-bird shrieked in the near distance, and after that sound had died away she heard faintly a cropping, munching noise, as of a horse feeding with its bridle on.

For a moment it seemed as if her heart would stop beating, and she clutched tightly at the veranda rail to save herself from falling; then, conquering her weakness by a resolute effort, she whistled shrilly and long, as she had done before.

This time there came back an answering whinny, followed by the trot of a horse's feet, accompanied by a chinking, dragging sound, which she could not understand. Her heart was beating furiously as she ran down the veranda steps and along the path to the paling that separated the garden from the paddock, but she did not forget to feel in the pocket of the big

apron she still wore, to make sure that she had something with which to reward Charley for coming in answer to her summons.

The horse trotted up to the palings with a whinny of delight at seeing her there, and immediately thrust a soft enquiring nose over the top bar in search of the payment for prompt obedience.

"Good old Charley!" she murmured, extending her soft pink palm, on which lay the half of a biscuit for the sagacious beast, and then she caught her breath in a sobbing gasp, for the horse had a saddle dragged low down on its right side, from which depended a stirrup-iron; this, trailing on the grass, had made the faint chinking sound that Caryl had heard and wondered at.

But now that the certainty of disaster had come, she lost at once the nervous trembling which had been upon her all the time since she had heard the gun-shot followed by the cry. Securing Charley by drawing his bridle through the fence and hitching it over a post, she fled back across the garden, up the veranda steps, and into the house, to the kitchen, where Beulah was tidying up for the night.

"Something has happened, Beulah, for Charley has come home with a broken saddle, the stirrup hanging on the ground. I have tied him to the garden fence whilst I came to find you, and now I am going out to look for Father," she panted, between dry choking sobs, as she flung off her thin house slippers, and began to lace on a pair of stout serviceable boots.

"Miss Caryl, it isn't to be thought of for a moment; you must just stay here in the house whilst I go to look for the master. I wonder what your mother would say to your going wandering about the country

alone at dead of night," Beulah said, her face going the hue of chalk, whilst her teeth chattered; for a broken saddle might stand for any kind of disaster, from a sprained ankle merely, right onward up to a broken neck.

A hysterical laugh broke from Caryl as she finished lacing her second boot. "I wonder what you would do out alone at night, you poor Beulah! You would lose your way a dozen times between here and Swallow Creek, and if you chanced upon a milking cow in one of the paddocks, you would be certain to think it was that new Scotch bull."

Beulah shivered, for darkness, bulls, and lonely places were the three chief terrors of her life, sensible, middle-aged woman though she was; but she would cheerfully have encountered them all, either singly or together, at a crisis like this.

"It is not fit for you to be out alone in the dark, and I'm going to ring the big bell; that will pretty quick fetch up the men if there are any on the place, which I doubt, for Lester, Forbes, and young Sutton went off in the afternoon to Endwater to be ready for the round-up in the morning," persisted Beulah, making a move towards the big dinner-bell.

"That only leaves Long Jim," groaned Caryl. Then, seeing Beulah's move in the direction of the bell, she flew to stop her, crying hastily: "Don't ring it, Beulah; on no account raise a clamour. If it could call the men back from Endwater it would be a different matter. As it is, the less commotion made the better, for more reasons than one; but chiefly because if Father hears it as he lies out there, hurt and helpless, it will drive him nearly mad with anxiety to know that we are in trouble here at home."

"Go and call Jim then, Miss Caryl; he'll surely be better than nobody," said Beulah, in keen distress, as Caryl slipped a rough thick coat on over the apron she had not taken the trouble to change, and, lighting a lantern, was quickly ready to start.

"I don't like Jim; I really believe I'm afraid of him." Caryl shuddered with distaste as she spoke. "No, I won't make any commotion; I'll just slip on to Charley's back and make the old horse carry me to where Father is lying."

"I'll not know an easy moment," sobbed Beulah, who was by this time broken down by concern and anxiety, "until I see you back again."

"There is enough for you to do. Have a good fire in the kitchen, and plenty of hot water. If you are busy you will not be so anxious," Caryl said, pausing for a moment before her father's big desk in the dark dining-room, of which both he and she had a key, and from which she took a revolver, for use should need arise. In that wild, sparsely-populated district it was necessary to have the means of self-protection at hand, and Reuben Mason had taken pains to make his young daughter a very good markswoman indeed.

Then she went out to the tethered horse, and, unbuckling the broken saddle, left it lying on the ground, put her own saddle on the horse, mounted by the aid of the garden fence, and rode away.

There were bars at the lower end of the paddock. If these were down, she would know that her father had ridden out that way in a straight course for Swallow Creek; but if they were not, she had determined to come back to the homestead and make another cast to find the direction in which he must have gone.

There was a faint glow in the east, as if the moon would be coming up soon, but the night was cloudy and very cold, despite the fact that it was nearly the middle of May. She shivered with cold as the old white horse paced slowly down the close-cropped grass of the paddock, out to the unfenced pastures beyond. Yes, the bars were down, and her heart leaped with mingled sensations of hope and fear as Charley broke into a trot when once the bars were passed, heading straight down the long slope towards the deep valley of Swallow Creek.

The going here was rough, the heavy crop of bunch-grass being ankle-high, even though flattened and pressed by the snows of winter and the tread of the range cattle; there were yawning vermin-earths, and treacherous cracks or fissures in the ground, into which an unwary animal might step and meet disaster. But Charley was a range horse of long experience, and hard to beat at his own particular work. Caryl had let the reins fall loosely on to the animal's neck, while, with the lantern tucked under her coat to be out of sight, she sat with her head craned forward, dumbly praying for guidance, and that she might find her father still alive.

Gruesome stories of tragic happenings were running through her brain. Only last year a ranchman had been found, with his skull battered in, on the slope of Pot Hole Coulee, and though subsequent enquiries proved that he rather deserved his fate than otherwise, the terror of its remembrance was on her now.

In the dim but increasing light she could see the faint outlines of the flume, which was a sort of aqueduct stretching across the valley of the creek bed,

for the purpose of conveying water from the main irrigation canal on to the thirsty lands of Tentover.

The flume had been built by her father, or, to be quite correct, it was her mother's money which had enabled him to launch into a system of irrigation which had doubled and trebled the value of his land; but it had cost thousands of dollars, and if it should fail now——!

But a great lump came into Caryl's throat as she neared the long ugly flume, which her mother declared was such a blot on the landscape, even though it was only visible from the valley of the creek. If it should be wrecked now, or be even only put out of working order for a time, what discomfort there would be in the home, and how much her father would have to endure!

Charley stopped suddenly, as if there were no need to go any farther, and, putting his head down, began to munch at the dry matted grass.

"Father," she cried, in a voice that was tremulous and shrill, "Father, where are you?"

In the silence that followed her call she could almost hear the beating of her own heart, and Charley stopped munching for a moment, as if waiting to see what would come of it.

"Father, Father, are you here?" she cried, her tone shriller now, as her anxiety grew.

In the breathless hush which followed the dying away of her shout there came a faint answering cry, so low and indistinct that she could not at first be sure that it was a response.

But when she sent her voice out in another shrill, quavering shout, the cry came back plain enough, though faint and far away.

"Here, child, here!"

Caryl caught her breath in a sobbing gasp of relief; at least her father was alive, and, that fact assured, nothing else seemed to matter very much.

"I am coming, Father," she called, her voice now vibrant with her relief and joy. Then she tugged at Charley's rein, dragging his head up with a jerk.

The cry seemed to come from the other side of the creek, which was swollen just now by the melting of the snows in the mountains, and it is little wonder that she hesitated about fording it in the dark, for she knew that the channel abounded in holes, many of them deep and dangerous.

But if her father were over there, nothing should hinder her from attempting to reach him; only first she must make sure that he was really on the other side of the creek.

"Father, where are you?" she shouted again, her voice hoarse now with the strain of her anxiety, and her fear of the deep and dangerous Swallow Creek.

"Here, child," was the response, but so low and faint that she fairly groaned in anguish because she could not tell where the voice came from.

"Are you over the creek, Father?" she cried again, feeling sure that he must be terribly hurt, by the faint response he made to her shouting.

"No; the bend of the ridge by the flume," came back the reply in slow, laboured speech; and then she understood why the sound of the voice seemed to come from far, for the bend of the ridge was a turn in the artificial bank of the canal where the water shot into the flume to cross the valley.

She slipped from the saddle then, for it was more than she dared do to ride up that steep ridge of loose

uneven ground in the dark; but the horse must come too, since there was no hitching-post handy.

She did not shout again before reaching the top of the ridge. For one thing, she needed all her breath for the climb, and for another, she feared to hurt her father by making him call out more than was necessary.

But when she reached the top, with the valley of the creek at her back, and the deep curve of the canal in front of her, she drew the lantern from under her coat, flashing its light around regardless of consequences supposing evil-doers were abroad.

Ah! what was that dark heap a dozen yards away, just where the embankment dropped steeply towards the curve?

With panting breath she hurried towards it, to fall on her knees beside the prostrate form, and gently touch the clay-cold hand that lay within her reach.

"Oh, Father, are you much hurt?"

But there was no response. Mr. Mason had fainted from the pain of his injuries, and for a time she thought he was dead.

CHAPTER III

WHO FIRED THE GUN?

IT seemed hours to Caryl before her father opened his eyes again, though doubtless it was only minutes that she spent in bathing his face with water from the canal before he came out of his swoon.

"I'm badly bashed up, little one," he said faintly, his lips quivering with pain and weakness.

"How did it happen, darling?" she murmured, rising to her feet to strip off the thick coat she wore; then, stooping over him, she began to wrap it round his shivering limbs.

"The saddle broke—". He groaned a little, as if the effort of speech were too much for him.

Caryl remembered the letter she had written to Lawton, the saddler, and her father's words about the saddle he was using, then asked no more questions, but prepared to act, and without any loss of time too.

"Father, I must leave you alone while I go home for the wagon; but I won't be long. I think I can do it in half an hour. Is there anything more I can do for you before I go?"

"No, only be quick;" his voice trailed off in a groan again, and then he lay still with closed eyes.

She dared not linger, not even to kiss him, and, turning away, led Charley to the fence rail where the flume began, then, scrambling into the saddle somehow, turned the horse's head down the steep cutting,

passed under the flume, then galloped him up the long slope of the valley towards Tentover as hard as she could go,

The lantern she had left standing by her father's side, thinking the feeble glimmer would keep him company whilst she was away. It seemed a long ride up the valley before the bars of the paddock were passed; but Charley was a willing horse, and seemed to understand that he must do his best that night. So it was little more than ten minutes before she drew rein at the garden fence, to shout to Beulah as she passed the house.

"Have you found him, Miss Caryl?" The flutter of a white apron showed where Beulah stood on the veranda in the shadow of the door.

"Yes, he is down by the flume, badly hurt. Ring the big bell, Beulah, and raise the place. I am going to get the little wagon. I shall want a mattress and some blankets to put in it."

Caryl rode on towards the farm buildings, which lay on the farther side of the house, never dreaming but that the ringing of the bell would bring one or more men to her assistance, though she knew very well that they were extremely short-handed on the ranch at that particular time, two men and young Sutton having gone out to Endwater for a beef round-up. But Long Jim and the boy who cooked for the men should be available, and she expected every minute to hear a shout from one or both of them as she rode Charley up to the wagon-shed; then, slipping off his back, she began to fumble at the straps of the saddle.

Beulah rang the bell with as much energy as if the house were on fire; then, shutting the house door

behind her, came running out to the shed to help put Charley into wagon harness.

"Is the master shot, Miss Caryl?" she asked in an agitated tone, while she deftly fastened the straps of the harness, being indeed no novice at the task.

"He did not say so; indeed he seemed scarcely able to speak at all. When I asked him how it happened, he said the saddle broke. Beulah, why don't the men come? I must have someone to help me to lift Father, and every minute is of consequence."

"Sleeping like pigs, I expect. Go on to the house, dear; I'll call them out." And Beulah sped along the cinder path to the wooden house where the men lived, prepared to beat the door down with her bare fists if they did not wake to open to her, and then to give them such a caustic specimen of her powers of expression as should make them ashamed of themselves for ever afterwards.

But her amazement was too great for words when, on reaching the hut, she found the door standing open, and no one there. Making sure of this latter fact by striking a match, she turned and fled back to the house even faster than she had come, for things were looking uncommonly strange, and she shrewdly guessed that more lay behind this mystery of disappearance than they had at present any idea of.

Caryl had tied Charley to the fence, and was already tumbling cushions and rugs pell-mell into the wagon.

"When are the men coming, Beulah? every minute is so precious!" she asked with a querulous impatient ring in her voice the other had never heard there before.

"I reckon that you and I are about the only men on the place to-night; at least we are all that I can

find," Beulah said, as she ran into the store-room for a small bottle of brandy that was always kept ready for an emergency like this.

"No men at home! But what shall I do? I can't lift Father alone!" cried Caryl in consternation.

"I'm coming with you; just let me slip the bolt of the veranda door. There, that's safe, and I dare say the house won't run away before we get back," Beulah replied, locking the door of the back porch and putting the key into her pocket.

Caryl said no more; every thought of hers was concentrated on the task of getting her father home with as little delay and as little suffering as might be. There would be time afterwards for other things.

Beulah climbed into the wagon; then Caryl, scrambling up beside her, took the reins, driving across to the bar-place, then down the long slope to the flume. Some sheep grazing near the homestead scurried away in a great flutter at the unusual approach of wheels in that direction at night; though a saddle-horse would have disturbed them not at all.

"We shall have a storm of some kind before dawn; I trust it won't come until we get Father safely housed," Caryl said abruptly, pointing to the sheep, which were beginning to feed again.

Beulah nodded; she had been born and brought up on the ranges, and knew there could be no surer forecast of foul weather than for the sheep to rise and feed at night; but she was not thinking primarily of sheep at that moment.

"If the master isn't shot, what was that gun fired for, Miss Caryl?" she asked presently, her tone a little breathless from bumping over the rough places. Apparently she had entirely forgotten or discarded her

previous theory about Long Jim being out shooting rats in a darkness too dense for him even to see his own gun, and her manner fairly bristled with the suspicion of foul play either intended or perpetrated.

"I don't know, nor yet who fired it, but I heard the sound plainly enough, and also the cry that followed it," Caryl rejoined with a shiver; then she burst out: "Shall we be able to lift Father into the wagon, do you think?"

"We must, seeing there is no one else to do it," Beulah answered with decision; and then they were silent again, saving when Caryl urged Charley forward with voice as well as rein, but using the whip sparingly, for the horse was a willing one and doing its very best.

Beulah set her teeth hard to keep from shrieking as they drove under the flume, with one wheel in water up to the axle, and the other coquetting with the bank in a fashion that seemed to invite disaster. But they got through safely, then with an abrupt turn the horse began to scramble up the loose steep side of the embankment.

"I'll get out and walk up here, I think," she said with a gasp. "Weight goes for something in a pull like this, and if anything is going to happen, I'd rather face it on my feet."

Caryl checked the horse a minute, and they both descended. "Perhaps you can get up faster alone than I can with the wagon. I left the lantern standing by Father. If you see the light, go on and don't wait." She pointed to the top of the embankment as she spoke, then turned again to the difficult task of getting horse and wagon up that loose and dangerous slope.

Beulah drew her skirts round her, and started off

at a nimble pace, for she was active and vigorous still, even though she had passed her first youth.

There was the tiny point of light at last, and, cheered by the sight, she pressed on, panting and out of breath, but far ahead of Caryl and the wagon.

Mr. Mason was lying so still and cold that her first horrified thought was that he must be dead.

Forcing some of the spirit between his lips, however, she was relieved to find that he was not only alive, but could swallow; the fiery draught so far reviving him that he was able to sit up, leaning against her, by the time Caryl reached the spot with the wagon.

But he did not appear to know them, or to understand their errand, babbling instead of a gun-shot and a cry, then calling out to Charley to be steady at the bank, for the saddle was not to be trusted.

"Oh, can't you see how it happened?" cried Caryl. "He was riding this way to make sure that all was right with the flume, then, hearing the shot and the cry, turned hastily down this steep uneven bit of embankment, the saddle gave way, and he was thrown. But he is fainting again. Oh, what shall we do?"

"Turn the wagon round, get into it, and be ready to pull. I'm going to hitch the lines round his arms and drag him up. It sounds cruel, but it won't hurt so much in the long run; the main thing is to be quick about it." As she spoke, Beulah flew to unfasten the driving lines from Charley's head; then, slipping them under the injured man's shoulders, gave them to Caryl to pull, whilst she herself lifted and pushed the heavy unconscious burden in the way she wanted it to go.

The fear in both their hearts was lest the lines

should break at a critical moment, but this fortunately did not happen, Caryl having seized on new ones when she harnessed in such desperate haste.

But it was a terrible strain to both of them, and the perspiration stood in great beads on their faces by the time the task was accomplished and the man's heavy bulk got into the wagon.

Disposing the sufferer as comfortably as possible, Beulah sat down on the floor of the wagon to keep his head from being jolted over the rough places, while Caryl led the horse at a slow walk down the embankment, under the flume, and up the valley towards the homestead. It was no question of pace now, but of easy going, and she strained her eyes to find the smoothest places.

There was a blur of thick clouds obscuring the moonlight, and the lantern had gone out from lack of oil, so she had to find a track as best she could.

"How is he bearing it, Beulah?" she called out once, but the answer was not encouraging.

"As bad as can be. Pray Heaven we may get him home alive; but don't hurry, whatever you do."

Caryl did not ask again; she did not dare, lest Beulah should say that her father was dying or dead.

It was a huge relief when the house was reached once more, and she backed the wagon slowly right up to the back porch. A lame Scotch terrier came dashing out to greet them, barking furiously, until, recognizing Caryl and the horse, it commenced a lively demonstration on three legs, by way of welcome.

"Down, Dandy, down!" she said, pushing away the dog, as it leaped upon her; then, remembering the

lame leg, and fearing lest she had hurt it, she stooped to pat the shaggy head.

The lifting down was not to be compared in difficulty with the lifting up, and though Mr. Mason groaned a great deal with the pain of being moved, he did not lapse into unconsciousness again when they got him into the house.

"Now, Beulah, are you afraid to be left whilst I ride into Lethbridge for a doctor?" Caryl asked, when they had done all that was possible to relieve the sufferer, who, however, only groaned, seeming unable to speak much, or to give them any idea of his injuries.

"No, I'm not afraid, at least not more than I can bear with. But what horse will you ride; not that skittish chestnut surely?"

"No; Kitty is turned out on the home range, and would take an hour or two to catch. I shall ride Charley. The old horse is not a flyer, but he will do his best, and I can take it easy home."

"You had better put on a cloth riding-skirt and a thick jacket, for the storm is coming, and I think it will be snow," Beulah said, doing her part towards speeding Caryl on her journey by unharnessing Charley and saddling him once more.

The dawn was coming as the horse and its rider cantered across the level paddocks to the highroad which passed within half a mile of the homestead.

It was the longest night Caryl had ever known, measured by the anxiety and suffering that had been crowded into its hours, and the dawn was bringing no relief, since it scarcely seemed possible to her that she would find her father alive when she returned.

Lethbridge was already briskly astir when she rode into the familiar streets, for when the sun gets up, the folks who live by the land must do the same, or be left hopelessly in the lurch.

Riding first to the doctor's, she saw him start at once for Tentover, begging him not to wait for her, as his horse was fresh, while Charley hung his head with a weary air, stumbling more than once. Plainly the journey home would have to be taken at an easy pace. But first she rode round to the police station, to warn the superintendent of the anonymous letter her father had received on the previous day.

A big black horse was hitched by the office door, and to her great relief Grip Alderson himself came out.

"I was just going to start for Tentover, Miss Mason. I hope nothing is wrong," he said gravely, taking off his hat and standing bareheaded by the side of her horse.

"There is a great deal that is wrong, I am afraid, Mr. Alderson," she said, looking down at him with a wan smile on her weary white face. "My father had an anonymous letter yesterday warning him that the flume was to be wrecked. He should have sent a wire to Macleod asking for a watcher; but it was late, and he put it off until to-day. Then, riding round that way last night to see that all was well, he had a bad fall, lying out in the open unable to move until I found him. I have just been for the doctor," she said with a little catch in her voice.

"That is bad. If only our information had come to light sooner we might have been on the spot, for a warning, also anonymous, reached Macleod late last night, and was wired on to us this morning. I have

just received it, and was on the point of starting for Tentover when you rode up."

"Can you come on with me now?" she asked, a little anxiously. "I am afraid things are very wrong, indeed, in more ways than one, for there was not a man to be found on the place last night when we wanted help so badly. Three of our men had gone to round-up for beef on the ranges beyond Endwater; but that did not exhaust the available supply, even though we are very shorthanded just now."

"I will come with you. Are you ready to start now?" he asked.

"Yes; but I can't go very fast, for my horse is so tired, and I had no time to spare to catch a fresh one, even if catching had been possible, which is not always the case," she replied, as he mounted the big black horse, then wheeled it round to ride at her side.

"Do you think your own men are concerned in this projected flume wrecking?" he asked.

"I don't know. I have hardly had time to think about it. We did not even know the place was deserted until we wanted someone to help us lift Father, and then Beulah and I had to do it alone," she said simply; then went on to tell him of the gunshot and the cry which had at first startled her.

He heard her story in silence, only asking a question here and there, but offering no comment at all until she had finished.

"I met that boy of yours; what is his name—Daly?"

"Yes, Daly cooks for the men, and helps Beulah in the house. Where did you meet him?"

"Coming out of Hoffman's stores at ten o'clock last night. I asked him if he wouldn't be rather late

getting back to Tentover, and he said that the boss had given him a holiday and he was staying in the town all night."

"That is strange, for I knew nothing about it, and Father usually tells me such things; still, he might have forgotten," Caryl replied, with some wonder in her tone.

Charley broke into a gallop at this minute, apparently not choosing to be beaten by the big black horse, and any sort of connected talk was out of the question, Charley's paces being of the awkward ungainly sort, which, though tending to great speed, gave his rider ample occupation in the art of sticking on to the saddle.

"What is that?" Caryl cried sharply, drawing her horse up with a jerk and pointing to a depression which ran like a valley in miniature up the middle of the great paddock that stretched from the boundary of the home paddock right out to the highroad.

Grip Alderson shaded his eyes with his hands, staring hard at the object which had attracted his companion's attention.

"It looks to me uncommonly like a man asleep, I think. I will ride across that way and see for myself, Miss Mason."

Caryl shivered; the man asleep might so easily be a man dead, and she was thinking of the cry that had followed the report of the gun fired in the night.

"I will come too. It won't make any difference, because we can reach the house by the little paddock. I left the bars down last night, or rather this morning," she said.

"You had better not," he said with a compassionate look at her weary white face, thinking that she had

had more than enough of horrors for that day at least.

"I shall come," she retorted a trifle obstinately, giving her horse a little cut to make it go faster.

He ventured no further protest, feeling that it would be useless; only it is probable that had she been anyone but Miss Mason of Tentover he would have ordered her to go on to the house and leave him to do his investigations alone.

As it was, a touch of the spur sent the black horse forward at a tremendous pace, which left Charley shambling along in the rear. And, reaching the figure, which lay with pale face upturned to the sun, he called out in reassuring tones: "The fellow is not dead, only a trifle knocked about."

CHAPTER IV

WHY REVENGE?

HE is not dead, Miss Mason," reiterated Grip Alderson as Charley ranged alongside the prostrate figure, and Caryl looked down with a startled face.

"You are sure?" she queried faintly.

"Quite sure, for he groaned when I first touched him," replied the man, stooping over the figure, and touching it with careful hands.

"Why, it is one of our cow-boys, Paul Sutton!" she exclaimed with a start, as the man turned the prostrate form so that she could see the face. "But I thought he had gone to Endwater with the others!"

"Ah! it will have to be looked into," he said concisely. "Ride on to the house as fast as you can, please, and send the doctor down here with a door, or a window-shutter, or something, but don't come back yourself." His voice had a ring of authority now, as if he had been speaking to one of the men who served under him, and she obeyed without a question.

Beulah met her at the door of the back porch, and helped her to alight.

"Dr. Brown is with the master still, Miss Caryl. I have been helping, but Daly is waiting on him now," she said, half-leading, half-carrying the tired girl into the kitchen, and plunging her into a cushioned chair by the stove.

"Is Daly back?" asked Caryl in surprise, remembering what Grip Alderson had said.

"Yes, he got in about an hour after you had gone. It seems he has been in the town all night."

"Beulah, how is Father; will he——?" but Caryl's pale lips refused to form the word that trembled on her tongue.

"Live? Yes, dearie, I think so, but——;" and it was Beulah's turn to pause, and she stooped to the stove to hide the tears which filled her eyes and threatened to overflow down her cheeks.

"But what?" Caryl's tone was sharp with pain and dread. ~~It~~ was as if she knew by instinct what was coming.

"Dr. Brown said something—only I don't see how he could know it at the first glance, so to speak—about the poor master being crippled for life. Don't you faint, Miss Caryl," she said sharply, as every scrap of colour faded from Caryl's face and lips.

But with a resolute effort she shook herself, rising to her feet and clinging to the table for support. "No, I sha'n't faint, Beulah; I can't spare the time," she said, with a wavering of her white lips that was meant for a smile. "Poor darling Father; but perhaps the doctor has made a mistake. Oh, and what am I thinking about! Grip Alderson rode out from the town with me, and we found young Sutton lying in the great paddock, shot, I think, and Mr. Alderson told me to send the doctor down with a door or window-shutter to bring him home upon."

"What next?" cried Beulah with uplifted hands. "We might as well set up a hospital at once at this rate."

"It can't be helped, and we must do our best. Can

"I go in there now to speak to the doctor?" and Caryl nodded her head in the direction of the room into which her father had been carried.

"No, you can't," said Beulah with decision. "Just you sit there and eat the biggest breakfast you can manage, for you will want it before the day is out. I will go and send Daly down to the paddock, for the doctor can't be spared yet from the master."

But even as she spoke, Dr. Brown came out of the room and entered the kitchen. A lean, wiry man, past middle life, and with a large experience of broken limbs, battered bodies, and the other injuries apt to result from rough-riding or furious driving.

When he heard that there was another patient waiting for him, he went off to the paddock at once, refusing to say a word to Caryl of her father, or to express any opinion about his condition.

Then, when the sound of his hurrying footsteps had died away, she crept on tiptoe into her father's room to see how it fared with him now.

He was conscious, and even tried to smile as she approached his side. "Poor little girl, what a rough time you have had of it!" he whispered hoarsely.

"Never mind about me, dear Father; is the pain so bad now?" she asked anxiously, thinking how much he was already changed by suffering.

"It is more bearable since the doctor came, but it is bad enough, Caryl. You must send for your mother to come home, for I am afraid that I am nearly done for," and his words trailed off in a moan of anguish, for to the strong man suddenly smitten down helplessness seemed harder to bear than death itself.

"Of course I shall send for Mother; we shall want her help in nursing you," she said in the brisk matter-

of-fact tone that was so reassuring to the stricken man. "May I say that you want Betty to come too, Father? She will nearly cry herself sick to be left in Toronto, with you ill at home."

"Yes, yes, poor lamb, she must come," he said, then closed his eyes as if to sleep, while Caryl stole away again to confer with Beulah and help in getting a room ready for the second invalid, whom they were bringing in from the paddock.

Paul Sutton had been shot through the shoulder with a charge of duck-shot, and there were marks of blows about his face and head as if he had been struggling and fighting before being shot.

He was still unconscious when they brought him in from the paddock, where he had lain so long, and where he must have perished if the snow-storm foretold by Beulah had come to pass. Fortunately, however, the sheep had made a mistake that night, and the morning, though cold, was bright and fine.

There was a good deal of mystery about the affair; for, although Sutton had been shot, no gun was found near him, while his presence at Tentover was unaccountable when everyone had supposed him to be ten miles away at Endwater with Lester and Forbes.

"Had Mr. Mason a gun with him when he was out last night?" Grip Alderson asked, as he was in duty bound to do, yet hating himself for it all the time, because of the wave of angry colour that surged into Caryl's pale face.

"No, certainly not. My father had only his revolver, which Beulah and the doctor must have removed when they undressed him. My father's shot-gun is there," she said, swinging her hand up towards the gun-rack on the wall of the dining-room.

Grip Alderson walked across the room and lifted the weapon down, noting with satisfaction the dust upon it, which left the marks of his fingers plainly visible.

"Do you see that?" he asked, drawing her attention to the dust. "Supposing Paul Sutton dies without speaking, as the doctor fears he may do, there can be no shadow of suspicion attaching to your father of having shot him in mistake for a flume-wrecker."

"I understand," she said, resolutely forcing back the anger she had felt at what she deemed his suspicion of her father. "But when can I speak to the doctor about my father, Mr. Alderson? I must know if his condition is critical, because I have to send for my mother and sister; and I do not know if I must telegraph, or whether a letter will bring them in time. They are in Toronto," she added, as if by an after-thought.

"I am afraid he won't be out yet, for he wants to extract all those shots before Sutton comes to his senses again; but I will go in and ask him. He can't refuse to tell me that much, though he is as cross as a bear with a sore head, and flung a boot at me just now because I didn't understand quickly enough which knife he wanted next."

Caryl winced at the mention of the knife, but thankfully assented to his proposition, waiting with feverish impatience for his return, that she might gather some idea of her father's chance of life.

Grip Alderson was away ten minutes or more, and when he came back his face was so grave that in her fear she jumped to the worst possible conclusion, and trembled so much that she could not speak.

"Doctor Brown says that a letter will be soon

enough to summon Mrs. Mason and your sister," he said in a dry, formal tone.

"Does he mean that they could not reach home in any case soon enough—that my father is dying now?" she asked, clenching her hands tightly in order to keep from shrieking.

Grip Alderson set his teeth hard. Among his confrères in the mounted police he was known as an absolutely fearless man, and one who had never shirked a danger seen or unseen. But now he was quailing before this slim, white-faced girl, and feeling that if escape had been possible he would gladly have run away.

She saw his hesitation, and gathered up her courage with a final effort of despair.

"You need not be afraid to tell me. I would rather know the worst than bear this agony of waiting," she said proudly, as if resentful of the pity for herself which softened the stern lines of his face.

"Doctor Brown says that if your father lives through the night he will probably live for years, even though he may never be strong again," the man said, gently softening the harsh dictum of the blunt, outspoken man of medicine, which had been to the effect that death would be a happier fate than helplessness to an active man like Mr. Mason.

Caryl drew a long breath. If only the night were passed, then, there might be some room for hope; but at present the black wall of her trouble hemmed her in on every side, with never a gleam of light to cheer the gloom.

With an almost inaudible "Thank you!" she was moving away to return to her father when he spoke again, in a commonplace, ordinary tone now, since

business must be attended to, even though the lives of loved ones hang in the balance.

"There will be no need for you to worry about the affairs of the ranch to-day, Miss Mason, for I shall be in charge, as this affair of the shooting must be investigated."

She started. "I had forgotten about the ranch, and if Long Jim is missing, there is only Daly to do anything until the men come back from Endwater."

"Daly can do all that is necessary, or, if not, I will see that it is done," he answered; and then she went on to her father's room, to forget everything else in the next few hours but the hand-to-hand struggle with death that was raging there.

The day had faded into night again before Paul Sutton came out of his unconscious condition, and was able to explain the mystery of his being found wounded in the middle of the great paddock when he was supposed to be away at Endwater.

"I couldn't rest, because I had only sent anonymous warnings to the boss and to the Macleod Police," he said feebly, perfectly clear in his head, but terribly weak from loss of blood.

"Warnings of what?" demanded Grip Alderson, who, having been away in Lethbridge during a great part of the day, had ridden out to Tentover at sundown to make himself useful and supplement the work of the trained nurse brought from the hospital by Dr. Brown.

"That Long Jim meant to wreck the flume out of revenge," said the invalid, staring up at the superintendent with solemn eyes, wondering how he came there.

"Why revenge?"

"It was something about a will; something that happened years ago, I think. Long Jim used to rave about it in his sleep, and go on about how he would do for the boss, and knock a hole in the flume at the same time, until I got so nervous that I sent the two anonymous letters when we were off to Endwater and he was to be left here at home with no one but that kid of a Daly to spy upon him. But when I'd got away I was so uneasy because I hadn't made a clean breast of all I knew, that I slipped away after Lester and Forbes had turned in, and rode over. But I had hobbled my horse in the farther paddock, and, coming round by the flume to make sure that nothing had already happened to it, I stumbled upon Long Jim with that shot-gun of his out stalking in the search of goodness-knows-what game; but in my own mind I settled that it was the boss he was looking after, and was rash enough to tell him so."

"You young idiot, it was like asking him to shoot you!" exclaimed Alderson, amazed at the other's rashness; for Long Jim was a powerful man of middle age, with a temper that was not angelic, and to be attacked in such a fashion by a boy not yet out of his teens must have been to the last degree exasperating.

"I don't think he meant to shoot, though he came right at me, belabouring me over head and ears. I did what I could to defend myself, and in the struggle the gun went off, more, I believe, by accident than design," Paul said weakly, for the explanation, brief as it was, had tired him a good deal.

"Very well, that's enough for the present. Now go to sleep and don't tire yourself any more;" and Grip Alderson drew the bed-clothes up, tucking them

in about the head and shoulders of the boy with a hand as gentle as a woman's.

It was well he had some idea of sick-nursing that night, for there was plenty for him to do in taking care of Paul, thus setting the nurse free to share Caryl's watch in the other room; whilst Beulah lay asleep on the kitchen settle, worn out by her two days and one night of continuous hard work, yet too obstinate to obey the doctor, who had ordered her to go to bed for a proper night's rest so that she might be ready to relieve the nurse when morning came.

She had dropped to sleep, nevertheless, and lay in perfect unconsciousness whilst Grip Alderson stole out of Paul's room every hour or so to tend the kitchen fire and see that hot water was ready for any emergency that might arise.

The doctor came out with the dawn, unwashed, uncombed, and grimmer than ever in appearance; for he too had been keeping vigil, fighting with death for a human life.

Caryl turned to him as he entered the room, seizing his hand in a nervous grip that told its own tale of the tension in which she had held herself through the night.

"It is morning now, Doctor. Will he live?" she panted, trembling as if smitten with an ague.

The doctor cast one searching look at the face, on the pillow, then answered in a sombre tone: "Yes, he will live, though I fear——"

But Caryl had broken down in a fit of irrepressible sobbing, and was hurriedly bundled out of the room, feeling only just then the joy of the good news, and content to leave all else until another time.

CHAPTER V

THE SKIRTS OF HAPPY CHANCE

"He broke his birth's invidious bar,
And clutched the skirts of happy chance."

HELEN ROWLANDS was murmuring the words over and over to herself as she swung along through the sunshiny suburban roads of residential Toronto, on her way down town for the morning's marketing.

She had been to hear a celebrated preacher on the previous evening, which was Sunday, but, owing to the home-sickness that oppressed her so sorely, she had brought nothing away from the service, saving the quotation which had rung with strange insistence through her brain ever since.

The home-sickness was upon her still, though in a modified form, for the morning was too bright, and her nature too cheery, to allow of many regrets, and it was more the problem of the future than the yearning for the unrecallable past that wrinkled her forehead in furrows of care as she paced along with the alert step and easy carriage of a country-bred girl.

"Thirty dollars a month is all very well, and a much too respectable sum to be flung aside on the chance of getting something better, when it is only a chance. But the pity of it is that it will lead to nothing better, and ten years hence I shall still be earning thirty dollars a month, with no more prospect

of betterment than now. Ten years! I couldn't endure it. Ten weeks has been bad enough!" and she shook herself with energetic distaste, though, truth to tell, it was little more than eight weeks since the day she had first arrived on the shores of Lake Ontario.

It was a habit she had of talking to herself in brisk energetic undertones as she walked, utterly absorbed, and, as a rule, very well satisfied with her private concerns.

More than one person turned to look as she passed, her eager, earnest face, swinging walk, and rapid monologue all combined to arouse an interest in the passers-by, of which, however, she herself was entirely unconscious.

Children out with their nurses, children in charge of other children, invalids slowly coming back to health, old and feeble folk, thronged the pleasant side-walks on the cheerful spring morning, enjoying the brightness and marking the opening flowers, swelling leaf-buds, and singing birds, harbingers of summer near at hand.

A pair of spirited horses attached to a laundry collecting-van were standing at the corner of Victoria Road, where the avenue leads off to Dunvegin, restlessly tossing their heads and champing their bits, ripe for any mischief that might come their way, and on the alert for a chance of bolting.

Helen ceased talking to herself as she came abreast of the fidgety pair, half-pausing in her rapid walk to admire their pretty skittish ways, and then to glance apprehensively round in search of the man in charge.

There was no responsible person to be seen, saving

a boy lounging over a gate a short distance away, talking to another boy.

"If anything frightened them they would be off without any fuss in the starting," she muttered; and just as she said it, a motherly little lassie of twelve or so, in charge of two mites in a double perambulator, with two small boys on foot, turned off the side-walk just in front of the restive horses to cross the road.

At the same instant the two small boys, who were a regiment on march, began with a fresh burst of martial music, the one lustily beating a toy drum, whilst the other blew a vigorous blast on a tin trumpet.

Up went the horses' heads, whilst their ears dropped flat back, as they made a dash forward for a mad scamper along the sunshiny avenue, so thickly dotted with old folk and perambulators.

But they did not do more than start, for Helen, seeing what was coming, and knowing the ways of horses too well to be afraid of them, sprang to their heads, deftly catching a bridle in each hand, whilst she talked to them in the soothing fashion most calculated to calm their ruffled nerves.

For a breathless minute they jerked and plunged, trying with all their might to get away; but she was resolute and strong, so absolutely fearless, too, that the minute sufficed for her to gain the mastery and subdue them to quiet.

She had entirely forgotten where she was, and saw nothing of the quickly-gathering crowd, the frantic rush of a policeman, or the terror-stricken face of the lounging boy. Her hat was off, her hair was tumbling about her shoulders, and an ominous sound of ripping cloth gave notice that her dress was torn.

Then a strong hand reached over her shoulder and

gathered the reins in a grasp like steel, while a cultured voice, with a thrill of admiration in it, exclaimed: "That was a brave thing for a girl to do; but it was terribly risky, and you would never have succeeded if you had not been so absolutely fearless."

"Oh, I love horses too well to be afraid of them!" she panted, her face hot and red, her eyes shining with the light of victory. "But these were so nervous that it took only a very little thing to upset them."

At this moment the policeman reached the spot, whilst the laundry clerk came at a run from the gate of the nearest house, and Helen turned to face the man who had arrived first to her aid.

In the heat and confusion of that first glance she only gathered the impression that he was extremely fresh and neat in his appearance, with a strong refined countenance, and the contrast with her own tumbled and dishevelled condition struck her with all the force of a blow.

Feeling instantly miserably self-conscious and shy, she relinquished her hold of the reins, and, looking round for the basket she had dropped, prepared to beat a hasty retreat.

This was not so easy as she had supposed, so many people had gathered round, and in tones full of admiration, or strident with indignation, were expressing their opinion of her pluck, or the gross carelessness of the men in charge of the van for leaving it in such irresponsible hands.

For a moment she was disposed to be sorry that she had stopped the horses, since it placed her in such an awkward position, whilst her tumbled hair and the shower of hair-pins when she moved her head, filled her with a perturbation that was akin to panic.

What a ridiculous spectacle she must be, and wherever could she go to put herself tidy? It was not possible that she could stand out on that public sidewalk arranging her hair and putting on her hat with all that crowd looking on. It was equally impossible that she could walk along the street in such a condition, and there were no shops near at hand into which she could run for shelter.

The mortification in her heart must have been visible in her face likewise, for a girl of thirteen or so, with a pair of roguish blue eyes, and the sweetest smile she had ever seen, took hold of her hand, saying, in the friendliest manner imaginable: "Come indoors with me—we are boarding at the house inside this gate,—then you can put up your hair again."

Helen turned to the child with a feeling of relief so keen that she nearly burst out crying; but before she could do more than falter out a confused "Thank you!" the man who had first come to her rescue greeted the blue-eyed girl as an old acquaintance.

"You here, Betty? I thought you were at school."

"I have a holiday," she answered briefly; then, turning her back upon him, drew Helen out of the throng and in at the open gate of the nearest house.

She had already retrieved the market-basket and the hat, and was loud in her praises of Helen's action in stopping the horses so promptly.

"I saw it all, and my heart nearly stood still with terror when I looked at you hanging on to the heads of those rearing, plunging brutes. A man would have thrashed them for trying to run away, or jerked at their bits until their mouths were bleeding, but you only quieted them with kindly words when you had mastered them, and I loved you for it!" exclaimed the

little girl, leading Helen in at the open hall-door of the handsome house, standing in its own grounds, and conducting her to a tiny dressing-room on the ground floor.

"The horses were not to blame, poor things; the trumpet startled them, and they tried to run away. It is of no use to punish creatures for being nervous; it really only serves to make them worse," Helen said, as she stood before the glass trying to fix her heavy masses of dark hair into a coil on the top of her head, but trembling so excessively from the strain of that sharp, brief struggle as to be unable to succeed at first.

"Do you feel bad; were you hurt?" Betty asked in sympathizing tones, pushing a chair forward for the other to sit down.

Helen collapsed then in a fit of hearty crying, which lasted for two minutes by the clock, scaring Betty so much by its stormy violence that she rushed away in search of her mother.

The outburst did Helen good, although it made her feel very much ashamed of herself, and she was standing before the glass again, putting the final touches to her hair, when Betty came back, accompanied by a lady with a beautiful, proud face, and a look in her eyes that made it easy to see she was Betty's mother.

"My daughter says that you have just done a very brave action in stopping some runaway horses, and that it has made you feel very ill. Can we offer you any refreshment?" she asked, in a voice that was silvery and cold.

"I need nothing, thank you, except a needle and cotton. I have torn my frock rather badly," Helen replied, displaying a long, ugly rent in the front of her dark cloth skirt.

Betty flew to bring the materials for mending, assisting at the task with great zeal and energy, though she hindered more than she helped, chattering all the time like a magpie.

"Oh, Mother, it was a grand sight to see Miss——! Oh, how funny, I do not even know your name!" she exclaimed, turning from her mother to Helen, whose head was bent over that tiresome rent.

"My name is Helen Rowlands." There was a little flash in Helen's eyes as she made the statement, for the lady was surveying her with a cool scrutiny which was exceedingly disconcerting.

"And I am Betty Mason of Tentover Ranges, Southern Alberta. So there, we are properly introduced," went on the excitable little maiden, giving Helen a friendly pat on the arm, which sent the needle with a sudden stab into her left hand, causing her to wince with the pain, though nothing would have induced her to cry out, so sweet was the friendliness of the lively Betty after the long weeks of toiling amongst strangers, during which time no warm hand-shaking or hearty greetings of any description had come her way.

"Do not be so demonstrative, Betty," said Mrs. Mason in a cold, disapproving tone.

"Oh, Mother, I can't help it! I have never seen anything finer in my life; and I know Eremus Kaye felt as I did, for his eyes glowed like red-hot coals when he dashed forward to hold the horses for Miss Rowlands."

"Was Eremus Kaye there? I thought he was still in Ottawa?" There was a ring of real interest in the lady's tone now, but Helen's cheeks grew unaccountably hot as she bent lower over her sewing.

"Perhaps he came back last night. Anyhow he was there, and the first person to come to the help of Miss Rowlands when she was struggling with those two great horses," replied Betty.

"Is he there now?" Mrs. Mason made a sudden move towards the door, but Helen sewed on more diligently than before, being very anxious to get away on her business to the town once more, and privately wondering what her employer would have to say regarding this serious delay in her marketing.

"I don't know. I expect the people have all gone by this time," Betty replied indifferently enough; and then, Mrs. Mason having left the room, she came to wind her arms in an ecstatic hug about Helen's neck.

"What a dear, affectionate child you are!" murmured the elder girl, with more than a suspicion of tears in her eyes as she stood up to take her leave, the rent having been temporarily adjusted to look as little conspicuous as possible, though it would require lengthy and careful darning later on.

"But you are a real heroine; and it is lovely to have the chance of hugging you. My sister Caryl is one of the bravest girls I know, but I don't think she would have had the courage to fight with those two horses as you did. Can't you stay longer? Oh, I am sorry you must go!" and there was genuine sorrow in Betty's tone as she followed Helen to the door.

Mrs. Mason was nowhere to be seen, for which Helen was secretly thankful as she walked through the flower-decked garden to the gate.

A few children lingered in the roadway, raising a lusty cheer as Helen came out. Bowing nervously in acknowledgment of the little ovation, she was hurrying on again, when her way was barred by a harassed-

looking lady, richly dressed, who caught at her hands, pressing them with hysterical fervour.

"It was you who stopped those horses and saved my little ones from being trampled to death!" she cried excitedly.

"I stopped the horses certainly, but the children might have been safe in any case," Helen replied lightly, not because she thought it, but for the sake of saving this agitated lady further distress of mind.

"I thought the darlings would have been all right out here, even though I had no one to send in charge of them but little Mary Carter. My nurse left yesterday, and it is just impossible to get servants here in Toronto," wailed the lady.

"I suppose it is a little difficult," Helen remarked dryly; then, mindful of her marketing, gently freed her hands from the other's clasp. "But I am glad the babies are safe, madame; and now, if you please, I must hurry away, for I have work to do which has waited too long already."

"Oh, but surely there is something I may do to mark my sense of indebtedness to you! Erebus said——" and the lady made an involuntary movement of her hand towards that part of her dress where a pocket might be supposed to be.

But Helen interrupted her with a haughty gesture, whilst her face flamed with an angry, uncomfortable red. "Pray, say no more of indebtedness, madame; it is the privilege of people to help each other as they go through life. And now I will wish you a very good morning."

"I did not even ask her name or address. Oh, what will Erebus say to me?" the lady murmured to herself, as she watched Helen's rapidly receding figure vanish

out of sight round the corner, whilst the children sped her going with another ringing hurrah.

Helen herself was in a fine state of fume, and inwardly raging because of that obvious movement of the lady's hand towards where the purse should be.

"Did she mean to bestow half a dollar on me, or would her sense of indebtedness have risen as high as a dollar, I wonder, if only I had been patient, and given it time to develop," she muttered, with an angry founce, as she held up her hand to stop an approaching car, and then quickly stepped aboard.

"Of course I ought to have been very grateful at such a chance of earning a shilling or two. What an awkward thing pride is, and how it tends to retard one's progress in the world!" she muttered below her breath, as she settled herself in a corner, thankful for the chance to sit down, for her limbs were trembling still from the wild turmoil and excitement of that minute when she had wrestled with the bolting horses and won.

"What a dear little girl that Betty is; I wonder if I shall ever see her again!" and a very wistful look came into her eyes as she thought of Betty's loving hug, the only embrace she had received since that heart-breaking parting with Philip at Oxford station, nearly ten weeks ago.

Something came up in her throat and nearly choked her, but she stirred restlessly in her corner, gripping her self-control with both hands, as it were, and so avoiding a break-down.

Then into her mind there floated again that worrying couplet:

"He broke his birth's invidious bar,
And clutched the skirts of happy chance".

"Perhaps if I had stopped to let that harassed mamma present me with a coin or two, I might have 'clutched the skirts of happy chance', and risen to fortune on the success of that well-earned reward," she muttered with an unmirthful smile, and never dreamed that, all unknowingly, she had taken a very firm hold indeed of the draperies of that same fickle, fleeting goddess, called by some luck, by others chance, and by the sensible few, who know what they are about, opportunity—since luck and chance are only names that have no real signification in God's great universe, where Divine Providence rules.

"So that was the wife of Eremus Kaye! Well, a man with such a fine, strong face and resolute eye might have chosen more wisely, I think," Helen said to herself in a tone of decision, as she stepped out of the car and entered the stores to do her marketing.

CHAPTER VI

AN IMPATIENT PATIENT

I AM sure I shall never get better lying in bed, Mrs. Ford; so when the doctor has been, I shall get up whether or no;" and Philip Rowlands turned to punch his unoffending pillow as if that were wholly and solely to blame for all the pain and weariness that had held him in bondage for so long.

"Now don't go doing anything rash, Mr. Philip, or you will be sure to suffer for it later on. You are getting along like a house afire as it is, and it would just be a sinful shame to have a set-back now," Mrs. Ford said anxiously, knowing only too well the impatience of her patient and the danger there was lest he should get another chill.

"If houses on fire did not burn faster than I am progressing, there would not be very urgent need of fire-brigades, I fancy," he said grimly, then dropped on to his pillow once more with a groan at his own weakness.

"You'll be better again if you only have patience," chirruped the good woman in a cheery tone, though there had been times in plenty during the last three weeks when she had believed him to be fast slipping out of life, while even now he was so frail that it seemed as if a puff of wind would blow him away.

Philip Rowlands had fought a hard battle for existence during the past five years, although previously he had never known a single day of illness. But a

plunge into the icy cold water of the mill-race, to save a comrade from drowning, when he himself was hot and exhausted from long running, had brought on such a severe illness from the chill, that his life had been despaired of for many weeks, and even his slow recovery only led up to a certain point, where he broke down again.

Since then his time had been chiefly spent in getting ill, and trying to get better, and very weary work he found it.

Then one day a doctor had said that he would never be better in England, because of the all-prevailing dampness, but if he could live in Western Canada he might grow into a strong manhood after all.

Since that time Philip's one aim and ambition had been to emigrate. He had thought of it by day and dreamed of it by night, until it became almost a monomania with him.

But he said very little whilst his mother lived, and the old grandfather, who had been all the father he had ever known. When, however, the two died, within six months of each other, all his long-repressed yearning came out, and he poured into Helen's sympathetic ears his hopes and longings to get well enough to emigrate.

Helen, however, was practical as well as sympathetic, and she knew full well that it was of no use to think of emigration for Philip in his present condition, unless he had a comfortable home to go to.

"You will have to let me go first, and make a little nest for you, laddie; then you can come out to me and we shall be as happy as turtle-doves or pigs in clover," she had said, with a laugh; then set to work to seriously consider the proposition in all its bearings.

They were very poor. When their grandfather died, six months after their mother, his will arranged that everything he possessed was to be at once sold by auction, and the money thus realized invested for use of his two grandchildren, or used for their maintenance if they should need it. And although it was a severe trial to Helen to see her old home broken up, and the household gods scattered to the four winds under heaven, she knew why the old man's will had been so worded, and silently blessed him for his forethought.

Philip did not know, or care either, except to be glad that there was the less hindrance in the way of their going abroad; for, as he sagely told himself, if Helen had but had half a chance of carrying on the farm after their grandfather died, there would have been but little hope of inoculating her with the emigration fever.

It was a bitter disappointment to him, and to Helen also, to find, when everything was sold and all the debts paid, that only about a hundred and thirty pounds remained to them, instead of the four or five hundred they had hoped and expected to have.

The trouble of it made Philip ill again, and when he was pulling slowly up to convalescence once more, Helen was ready with a plan of campaign which she had prepared for his approval.

"I have had a situation offered to me in Toronto, Phil, with a salary of thirty dollars a month, and I think if you can spare me for a few months I can't do better than take it. I shall have a chance to look about me and settle as to where we can best make a home."

"Toronto!" Philip had cried, in great disgust; "why,

that is on Lake Ontario, and the most stuck-up place in the whole Dominion. We should never do anything there, except, indeed, to be poorer than we are here in England. I want to go right through to Manitoba or the North-west Territories. It is of no use sticking East and starving when all the wide lands of the West are crying out for men."

"That may be," Helen replied, with a laugh; "but half a loaf is better than no bread, you know, and I shall have a chance to look about me and see how the land lies, east and west too."

"A fine chance you will have of knowing anything about the country, shut up in an underground kitchen, cooking dinners, at thirty dollars a month," retorted Philip, while actual tears of disappointment rose in his eyes; but then he was only seventeen, and his five years of suffering had worn his nerves down to a feminine level of sensitiveness.

"More than you think. I shall read the newspapers, interview real-estate agents, and get a large amount of information that I never could find out by remaining in England; and when one has only a very little capital it is as well to be discreet in laying it out."

"Perhaps you are right; you mostly are," he admitted, with a shake of the head. "But it seems like a dreadful waste of time. When would you have to go?"

"Next week. It will be a breathless rush, I know; but the sooner I start, the sooner you can come after me, and the less time we shall have for dreading the parting," she said, with a little break in her voice, for she had no one in the world left but her brother, and it was terribly hard work to face a separation of months, perhaps a year even.

"So soon? That is jolly! Why, there might even be a chance for me to get out to you before the autumn; for if I pick up a bit this summer I might be fit for a situation of some sort where I could at least earn my food," he answered eagerly; and so the momentous question of the future settled itself, and Helen set about her preparations for very speedy departure.

But the parting was harder than either of them had reckoned on. Philip came as far as Oxford with his sister, and would have gone all the way to Liverpool if she would have permitted it; but she feared that the strain of the long journey, added to the pain of the parting, would break him down.

So they parted on the platform of Oxford station, he standing white and silent amid the crowd of comers and goers, she smiling bravely from the carriage window until the train glided out of the station.

Philip went back to his humble lodging in the house of Mrs. Ford at Leaview, which was on a bold hill-top thirteen miles from the city, and after doing successful battle with his loneliness for a week, sought and obtained the position of pupil-teacher in the village school, where he earned half a crown a week, and foolishly tried to live on it.

Of course the result was speedy break-down, followed by weeks of intense suffering, whilst the prospect of a big doctor's bill, and all the other expenses of a severe illness, menaced him like the grim phantoms of a nightmare.

But he was determined that Helen should not know how ill he was, fearing greatly lest she should cast prudence and economy to the winds, and fly back from Toronto as fast as steam could bring her, to succour him in his suffering. So, week after week he

was propped up in bed to write to his sister, succeeding, with a bravery that was positively heroic, in scribbling bright witty letters, full of fun and jollity, and so brimming over with courage and hope that Helen was completely deceived as to his condition, and believed him to be bearing the parting better than she had even dared to hope.

Now he was really creeping back to strength, and the first week in June found him anxious and eager to be leaving the bed on which he had lain so long.

The weather was as unlike June as it well could be. Howling wind and driving rain had ushered in the month, the days being as dreary as if it were late October instead of the month of roses.

Then came a morning when the sun shone, and immediately Philip felt a desire to be up and about. It was the day, too, when he usually had his letter from Helen, and the thought of its coming seemed to give him new strength.

But Mrs. Ford would not hear of such an adventurous move until after the doctor had been, and so he had to curb his impatience the while he lay waiting for the sound of wheels on the gravel, which should announce the arrival of Dr. Frost.

Mrs. Ford was inordinately proud of that bit of gravelled drive in front of her house, although as a matter of fact it was about as weedy and ill-kept as a drive could be; but in her opinion it was the sign-manual of gentility, and she prized it accordingly.

But it so chanced that Dr. Frost had left his gig lower down the lane that morning, and came walking in upon Philip when the boy least expected his coming, the grating of the wheels on the gravel usually

serving as a warning for him to slip study-books out of sight.

"Hullo, young man, what sort of light literature is this you are indulging in?" enquired Dr. Frost, picking up a Greek Lexicon which lay on the bed at Philip's elbow and curiously turning over its leaves.

"There is nothing like Greek for taking a fellow out of himself, and I do want to get better so badly," the boy answered with an impatient fling.

"You are going on finely now; a few days of sunshine and you would be out in the garden. But this sort of thing won't do you any good yet awhile;" and the doctor laid the Lexicon down with a resounding bang on the table beside the bed.

"Then, if I am getting on so well, you won't feel offended if I ask you not to come again; not if it is not necessary at least," said Philip, getting rather red in the face, but coming to the point with great directness and plainness of speech.

"Tired of my society, eh? Well, you are not the first person who has voted me a bore;" and the doctor laughed in genial appreciation of his own small joke.

"No, indeed! Your coming has been about the one bright thing I have had to look forward to, except my sister's letters; but poor people have to do without luxuries, you know," Philip answered, smiling up into the kindly face bending over him.

"I suppose that means, in plain English, that you want me to send in my bill?" the doctor said with another easy laugh.

"If you please!" Philip's tone was almost curt, for the thought of that bill and its probable size had been like a nightmare to him for days and weeks past.

"I am too busy to make out bills now. Christmas

is my time, and I can't do it before. But I've got so used to looking in on you that I shall keep it up a little longer yet, though I promise you that I won't charge you for any more visits, unless you get ill again that is;" and again the merry-hearted doctor laughed long and loudly, as if in his opinion it was all a very good joke indeed.

"I would rather have it now, then I should know where I stand," Philip said with an uneasy shuffle.

"Excuse me, you are not standing at all, you are lying. Meanwhile I am not sure that you are to be trusted with a document of so much importance as a doctor's bill. I shall have to wait and send it to your sister."

"Please no! Helen has not heard a syllable yet of my being ill, for I've always managed to send her the letter as usual, even the week I was so very bad and wasn't sure but the effort would be my swan song." Philip's tone was dead earnest, and, seeing this, the doctor became earnest also.

"Your sister shall not be worried, I promise you, nor you either, until you feel yourself in a position to pay without its being such a terrible sacrifice. I have known what it was to be short of money myself, and can understand how you dread the thought of an account mounting up; but you need not in this case, I can assure you."

"You are very good," Philip answered, lamely enough, his thoughts being more eloquent than his tongue just then.

"Have you heard anything more from those Kentish solicitors who have the management of your great-uncle's affairs?" Dr. Frost asked, by way of turning the conversation.

"Bawdrey & Nunn? Yes, a letter came from them last week. It was directed to Helen, but I opened it. They said they were pretty certain that Uncle Giles had left a will, there being several allusions to it among the old man's papers; but as yet no trace of it can be found, although they have been advertising and searching for it in all directions."

"It is a funny business, taken all round, and very hard on you and your sister, since it is possible that you may benefit largely by it," Dr. Frost said as he prepared to take his leave.

"My hopes lie in its not being found, although even then it will mean a weary waiting, I fear, since the lawyers will be sure to let a good long time elapse before treating the missing will as non-existent," replied Philip with a dubious shake of his head.

"Circumstances alter cases, you know, and they might come upon certain evidence of its having been destroyed."

"They might do, but I hardly think they will; for old Miss Dottridge, that is the housekeeper, you know, declared that Uncle Giles had often spoken of his will as being in a very safe place, and that it would be quickly found when the right time came."

"It is a remarkably queer affair. I don't know that I ever heard of a queerer, but, like most other things, I expect it will right itself with time," Dr. Frost said as he hurried away to see his next patient.

"A remarkably queer affair indeed!" echoed Philip with clenched teeth and a very sour expression of countenance when he was once more left alone.

Any allusion to the missing will of his great-uncle, Giles Harper of Beckington, Canterbury, always served to ruffle his temper, or, as he phrased it, "to

put his back up", but the doctor, not knowing this, had erred in all innocence.

If old Giles Harper had died intestate, then Helen and Philip Rowlands might have shared, with about thirty other next-of-kin, the twenty thousand pounds or so that he had left behind, and although their share would not have amounted to very much, it would have made all the difference in bridging the time of waiting for Philip by making it possible for him to start at once for a drier climate, wherein he might hope to get well and strong again.

The unlucky allusion to these sour grapes sent him into the dumps for a couple of hours or more, and he did not recover his serenity until it was nearing the hour for the second post to arrive, by which time he was up and dressed, making a valiant effort to look and feel like a perfectly well man, though in truth he appeared only as the most shadowy of convalescents.

Ah, there was the postman, and Helen's letter too! He went dizzy and sick with the joy of its coming, then sat for a while unable to open it because of all the sick, vain yearning that swept over him for a sight of the writer and a sound of her voice.

It was a longer letter than usual, and gave a full and racy account of her small adventure in stopping the spirited horses attached to the laundry-van, then went on to relate what resulted from it.

"I was more than an hour late in getting back to the tread-mill, otherwise the kitchen of Mrs. Rodway; and that lady, believing that I had been wilfully wasting my time, and refusing to listen to the explanation I was modestly prepared to give, treated me to such flights of stormy eloquence, and called me so many offensive names, that finally, and as the

only way in which I could hope to preserve my self-respect, I told her that I would resign my post, whereupon she quickly climbed down and begged me to stay.

"But I cannot, oh, I cannot endure the tirades of abuse which Mrs. Rodway inflicts upon her domestics, and so in four weeks' time I shall be on the wing, but where?"

"I find I can easily make forty or even fifty dollars a month by staying here; but it brings me no nearer to you or the realization of our dear hopes of reunion. You could not live in Toronto, and your abuse of the place is so correct that it might well have been written on the spot.

"So I may go farther west, as far as Winnipeg, if I can get the promise of work to do, and I shall feel that every mile I go farther away from you does but serve to shorten the time until I see you again. Are you well, dear? Your last few letters have been so exceedingly vivacious that I have been fancying you very ill indeed, by sheer force of contrast, for your strength and spirits have always been most unequally yoked.

HELEN."

Philip's hands fluttered about the letter like a caress, whilst he muttered to himself: "So in my anxiety to do it well I must have rather overdone the gaiety business. I am not sorry she is disgusted with that wretched cook's place though, for what could she expect to learn of western farming mewed up in a Toronto kitchen? If only she goes west— But oh dear, if only I could go too!"

CHAPTER VII

FACING THE FUTURE

I OUGHT to have been sent for immediately. Summoned by telegraph, I might have reached home three days ago. But really, Caryl, neither you nor Beulah seem to have kept your heads cool enough for doing what was necessary in an emergency," Mrs. Mason said, in petulant reproach, as her daughter helped her into the waiting wagon.

Caryl had left her father's sick-bed in order to meet the train at Lethbridge by which Mrs. Mason and Betty were to arrive from the east; and as she expected only reproaches, she could not be disappointed by her mother's first words. Yet, tired and saddened as she was by all that she had gone through during the past week, it was hard work to answer back with patient cheerfulness, putting the best possible face upon things, as her father would wish her to do.

"We thought the wire would frighten you so terribly. And when Dr. Brown said that dear Father would live, we decided that it was kindest to spare you the shock."

"It is dreadful to think that I should have been in ignorance of his condition all this time. Why, on the night of his accident I was at a little dance at Mrs. Garret-Kaye's, and the very day I received the letter calling me home I was engaged to dine with Mrs.

Rodway, who has a really wonderful cook just out from England. But of course I had to send an excuse," Mrs. Mason babbled on, as Caryl stooped to kiss Betty, then turned to arrange as much of the luggage in the wagon as they could take with them then.

"We cannot possibly take all those trunks, Mother dear. Which do you wish for most? I can send on for the others to-morrow or the next day," Caryl said, surveying with no little dismay the heap of luggage which her mother had brought.

"I should like my travelling-bag, the black trunk, and Betty's leather portmanteau. But why can't you stow in one or two more of the trunks, Caryl? I have such a heap of pretty things to show you."

"Because it will add to the weight of our load, making us longer going home. And as I have not left Father before, except for a business ride round the ranch, I am very anxious to be back again as soon as possible. Jump in, Betty dear, and don't look so pale; Father will be ever so much better for the sight of your sweet little face."

Betty was indeed very pale, with dark rings round her eyes from overmuch crying. There was a quivering catch in her voice, too, when she asked after her father, which showed how troubled she was on his account.

"He seems about the same; we do not see much difference from day to day, except that sometimes he suffers more than others," Caryl replied, as she gathered up the reins and started the horses at a good pace along the level road. "Dr. Brown says we ought to be very grateful that he does suffer, because it is a sure sign that the spine is not so

badly affected as at first we feared, and even points to a hope that he may some day walk again."

Mrs. Mason shivered. Pretty social butterfly as she was, with her graceful figure and charming manners, the very mention of sickness and suffering was repellent to her, whilst the prospect of living in daily familiar contact with it fairly frightened her.

"It is dreadful to think of a strong man like your father being smitten down so suddenly," she moaned, clasping her delicate hands tightly together as she tried to brace herself for the ordeal in store for her.

"It will be very hard for him to bear, I fear, and it must be our endeavour to let him feel it as little as possible," Caryl said with a tender look coming into her eyes, as she lightly touched the black horse with the whip, because it was leaving an undue share of work for the brown one to do.

"At least we shall have to leave that horrid lonely Tentover now, and go to live in a town; why, even Lethbridge would be better than nothing!" exclaimed Mrs. Mason, with a note of exultation in her tone that she found it impossible to suppress; for no one saving herself could even guess how she hated the lonely ranch on the Height of Land, which her husband loved better than any place on earth.

"Oh, Mother, no!" cried Caryl in such a shocked tone that Mrs. Mason drew back aghast. "It is quite bad enough for Father to lie still and suffer instead of going here and there about the ranch at will, but he will be able by and by, I hope, to lie on the veranda and enjoy the view. And he can be brains and judgment for me, whilst I am hands and feet for him."

"You!" said Mrs. Mason with dismay in her tone.

"But a girl can't manage a ranch like Tentover; the men would never stand it."

"Then they will have to go, and some fresh hands be procured in their place," Caryl said, with a rigid set of her softly rounded chin which betokened a vast amount of latent vigour and determination. "It is a great relief to have you and Betty home, Mother, for you will be able to help Beulah and the nurse, leaving me free to look after matters out-of-doors. We have really two invalids on our hands; only I did not tell you so in my letter, because I feared to frighten you too much;" and she plunged into the story of Paul Sutton's injury, which lasted until Tentover was reached.

"Caryl, did Long Jim mean to shoot Father?" Betty asked in an awed undertone when they reached the house and her mother's attention was distracted momentarily by Beulah.

"I fear so," the elder sister said gravely.

"Then what a mercy it was for us that the saddle broke and Father had his bad fall," cried the child, going very pale, "for an invalid father is better than no father at all, and we should have been orphans."

Caryl caught her breath in a gasping sob, and quickly averted her head. That there should be any element of good in that broken saddle was quite a new view of the case to her; and yet, as Betty represented it, the accident was like an interposition of Divine Providence to save her father from falling a victim to the murderous intentions of Long Jim.

Then came the question that was mostly uppermost in her mind now: What had her father done to turn that sombre, lazy cow-puncher into such an implacable foe?

Long Jim—he seemed to have no other name, or at least she had never heard of it—was a man nearly as old as her father: a tall, well-built figure of a man, who might at some time have been exceedingly good looking, but whose face bore so many marks of evil living and dissipation that all its comeliness had long since disappeared. Sullen, silent, and lazy, he was unpopular with both his employer and his fellow-workmen; but he had stayed on at Tentover for quite a long time, three or four years—Caryl could not be sure which,—whilst most of the cow-punchers were here to-day and gone to-morrow, or at least after a few weeks or months.

Several of the men had objected to the building of the flume, by which water was brought to Tentover, for it meant the gradual changing of the ranch from a mere cattle range to a corn- and beet-producing farm. This, though vastly more profitable, because more productive, would do away with the necessity for rough-riders to a large extent, the cow-boy being replaced by the agricultural labourer, or, worse still, machinery, and so the innovation became a cause for ill-feeling between master and men.

Mr. Mason was wise enough, however, to know that his hope of future prosperity lay largely in bringing water to Tentover, for, as the march of civilization and settlement spread through the state, he would presently find his ranging privileges limited to his own fifteen hundred acres, and without water they would not carry much cattle through the fervid summers when no rain fell, or the long mild winters when the snow did not cover the land.

At present the ranges were of almost limitless extent, and when the cattle failed to find food in one

district they wandered on to another, being only heard of at round-ups, or when they were specially sought for. But the old order of things was changing; land was being enclosed with fences in all directions; the irrigation system of Lethbridge was spreading fast; small farms of a hundred and sixty acres were being bought up, each one with water privileges on the canals; and the country which he had first known as a sun-dried solitude was becoming a populated district.

Mrs. Mason broke down in a fit of hysterical sobbing two minutes after she set foot in her husband's room, and was promptly hustled out by the nurse and delivered into the hands of Beulah, who petted and made much of her until she was once more restored to composure. Everyone, from her husband downwards, did pet and make much of Mrs. Mason, however capricious and unreasonable she might chance to be.

Betty, who had crept into the sick-room in the wake of her mother, would doubtless have been turned out too, but that she was so very quiet as at first to be overlooked by the nurse; whilst later on she proved herself so useful that the nurse was only too thankful to make her free of her father's chamber.

In the days immediately following her mother's return Caryl had little time to spare for indoors, but was in the saddle almost from morning until night, and the strain was obviously telling upon her.

There were other difficulties facing her too, which, although at present only looming in the distance, would have to be taken in hand at close quarters before long. Those pretty things with which Mrs. Mason had filled her trunks during her stay in Toronto were not all paid for yet. And the problem of where

to find the money to pay the bills, and at the same time carry on the work of the farm to a successful issue, was beginning already to print lines of care on Caryl's face.

Mrs. Mason had been home for rather more than a week, the invalids were progressing as well as could be expected, and affairs at Tentover were gradually adjusting themselves to the altered circumstances, when Caryl, riding round by the flume one morning, chanced upon Grip Alderson coming at a raking gallop up the valley of Swallow Creek.

He reined up sharply at sight of her, and, dismounting, went with her to examine the ninety-foot stretch of architecture which represented the prosperity and well-being of Tentover.

"I don't suppose it would ever have occurred to me to be so careful in inspecting the flume if it had not been for that letter and the fright about Long Jim," Caryl said, as she scrambled down the embankment to return to her horse.

"I don't fancy Long Jim will show his face in this direction for some time to come, so you have nothing to fear from him. Shall I help you?" and Grip Alderson stretched out his hand as she stumbled, slipped, and nearly rolled to the bottom.

"I can manage, thank you," she answered, regaining her footing, and coming with a little run to the end of the slope. "But I do wish this was not such a lonely place. If only the house had been built here, it would have made such a difference to my anxieties just now; for the safety of that water-way means everything to me this summer."

He nodded in comprehension. "Mr. Mason is being wise in time, and breaking up land fast. But how

much longer are you going to work single-handed?" he asked, his grave, sombre face looking sternly forbidding in the light of the bright spring morning.

"What do you mean?" she asked in surprise.

"Your work is too much for one person; you ought to have someone to help you," he said, as he swung himself into his saddle after assisting her to mount.

"There are difficulties in the way," she admitted very frankly. "You see, I must and will be master; and if I had even an assistant manager, he might, and probably would, object to being hectorred for any dereliction of duty by a mere girl. The men bear it pretty patiently so far, but I am always haunted by the fear lest they should revolt and desert in a body."

"You could soon supply their places," he said, smiling at her expression of comic consternation. "But if a man assistant is out of the question, why not try a woman?"

"Girls are not, as a rule, good at riding; still, it would not be a bad idea if I could get one of the right sort, one who did not mind work, and thought it no disgrace to do anything, however rough," Caryl replied thoughtfully.

"They are to be found. I heard the other day of a ranch in Colorado that is run entirely by seven girls."

"I think, then, I had better send for one of the seven to come and stand by me," she said with a gay little laugh. "One would surely not be much missed from such a number. Are you coming in to see our invalids to-day, Mr. Alderson?"

"Yes, if you think your father is able to receive visitors. Then I must be off back to the town, get a

fresh horse, and set out for the Milk River Ridge, where some horse thieves from over the border are making things lively for us."

"Father will be very glad to see you," she said rather breathlessly, for her horse was taking pattern by that of her companion, and going up the slope at a long, lolloping gallop which rendered talking difficult. "He was talking about you last evening, and wondering when you would come again. Already the time is beginning to hang heavy on his hands; he has always been so active, you know."

"Yes, I know," the inspector rejoined briefly, and, the house being reached, he dismounted and went into the shaded room where the owner of Tentover lay, while she rode on to the fenced lands on either side of the canal, where the spring corn was already showing green through the rich brown of the virgin soil.

"If only Father could see it!" she murmured, with a sigh of pity and a pang of bitter regret for his helplessness; then, remembering Betty's words about an invalid father being better than no father at all, went on her way with a thanksgiving in her heart that the trouble was no worse.

It was evening before she saw her father again; but when she went into his room to sit with him for an hour after supper, he greeted her with more life and eagerness than at any time since his accident.

"Caryl, I am so glad you have come! Are you too tired to write a letter for me?"

"No, dear, I can write two if you like," she said briskly, not choosing that he should discover how very weary she was, or how much she longed to sit resting in the pleasant after-supper leisure.

"One will do for to-night, though it may have to be

rather a long one. I want you to write to those Canterbury solicitors, Bawdrey & Nunn."

"Why, who are they? I don't think I have heard of them before," she said blankly, wondering a little if he were wandering in his mind, for all remembrance of his mention of Giles Harper's will had faded from her mind for the time, crushed out of sight and recollection by all that she had had to think of since.

"Yes, you have. Do you not remember the advertisement in that Kentish paper that I showed you the night before I was hurt, about the will of Giles Harper being wanted by these men, Bawdrey & Nunn?"

"Oh yes, of course I do; how stupid of me to forget! Giles Harper was the man who gave you the hundred pounds, was he not?"

"Yes; with instructions to pass the kindness on as soon as I could. And since I have been lying here, I have been wondering if this accident may not have come as a reminder that I have neglected my duty to my neighbour in failing to do it, for I have handled a good many hundreds of pounds since then, Caryl."

She nodded her head in sympathetic fashion, and in her heart believed that he was right, though she could not wound him by saying so.

"When you get better we can set that matter straight," she replied brightly, smoothing back a lock of hair which had fallen over his face.

"I may never get better, and if I have to leave things as they are now, you may have a very hard fight for it, because I had to drop things half-way through, as it were. But God judges intention as well as action, and if you do your best, Caryl, to pass that kindness on—if not in actual money, in helpful deeds,

—the blessing of it will return upon your own head," he said in an agitated tone.

"Don't talk any more now. Let me write your letter for you," she urged, dreading excitement for him. "What am I to say to those men, dear Father?"

"Tell them that I witnessed the will; that the intention of the testator was that I should benefit by it to the extent of a hundred pounds, but when I pointed out to him that my being a witness would nullify the bequest, he gave me the hundred then to start in life with."

"Can you remember the provisions of the will?" she asked.

"Not entirely, because there were a good many legacies, but the bulk of the property was to be divided between two nieces, Kate and Fanny, daughters of his brother," the sick man replied.

CHAPTER VIII

A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

IT was Helen's evening out, and she was spending it in the Public Library, laboriously wading through the advertisement sheets of the Colonial papers.

There were cooks in plenty required, with waiting-maids, typists, female clerks, and governesses, but no homesteader seemed in need of a girl assistant, nor was there any apparent demand for women cow-punchers, or rough-riders, and she was turning from the broad pages of the *Western Free Press* in weary disgust when a paragraph caught her eye in a location puff, causing her to read it carefully through twice over:—

"Why not settle in the warm Chinook Belt instead of facing the bitter winters of Manitoba. Snow falls here in only small quantities during the winter months, and your cattle can feed out on the ranges all winter, only the young and feeble needing protection. If anyone tells you that Southern Alberta is too dry for crops, come and visit the farms of old-timers who have grown grain successfully for seventeen years past. Our soil has no superior in the West, and our climate has no equal."

"I wonder if it is all true!" she muttered. "If it were only half true it might mean life and health for Philip. I would go and invest part of our money in buying land directly if I were quite sure about it."

But if I made a mistake, not only should we be ruined, but his life might even be forfeited by the blunder. If only I could get a little light on the situation, and know what to do!" Her head dropped on her hand then, and she prayed as she had never prayed before, that God would direct her steps and lead her in the right way.

For a minute she had forgotten that she was in a public place, that men and women were passing round her, and that she was supposed to be reading the newspaper. Then, when she lifted her head, a voice accosted her by name, and a hand that looked familiar was stretched out in greeting.

"Miss Rowlands, I am very glad to meet you here. I have been searching the city over for you since a fortnight ago yesterday, and was being forced to the conclusion that you were a bird of passage, when I glanced in here to find you bent over the newspaper with as much interest as if it were a veritable book of fate."

Helen started up in great surprise, and some confusion, to see the man standing before her who had so promptly come to her rescue when she battled with the bolting horses; he whom Betty Mason had spoken of as Eremus Kaye.

"I believe that you are Mr. Kaye?" she said, a little doubtfully, as she shook hands with him; not that she had any difficulty in recognizing him, but simply that she wondered what an English Mrs. Grundy would say about her shaking hands with an individual to whom she had not been properly introduced.

"Eremus Kaye, at your service," he replied, with a bow, his clear-cut features and dark penetrating eyes appearing even more refined and pleasing than

on her first acquaintance with him. Then, looking down at the newspaper on which her hand still rested, he asked in a different tone: "Is it a book of fate to you?"

"Yes, I think so," she said gravely, then, yielding to a sudden impulse, drew his attention to the paragraph she had just been reading. "Do you know Southern Alberta at all, and does it tally with that description?" she asked with a wistful anxiety in her face.

He bent closer to read the small print, being apparently short-sighted, then replied slowly: "I have been there, and I should say the description is very exact, and by no means overdrawn. I have friends living near Lethbridge, and they have always been enthusiastic regarding the climate, though socially I understand it is very lacking."

"In what way?" she demanded rather brusquely, supposing he meant that human life was not safe there, because of wild beasts or Indians. To her the Dominion west of Winnipeg was all more or less *terra incognita*, and the North-west Territories only another name for a vast howling wilderness.

Eremus Kaye shrugged his shoulders in an enigmatical fashion. "You will remember that I have never lived there, so my information is second-hand and not coloured by my own prejudices; but I am told that Southern Alberta is very wanting in good society, that no really nice people live there, and that the whole tone of the place is quite hopelessly common and low."

"Is that all? I believe it would be an ideal place for me to take my brother to if only I could get work of some kind to do that would bring grist to

the mill until I saw my way to a small farm," Helen exclaimed, with a great relief and hope coming into her heart.

"Have you an invalid brother, and is he here in Toronto?" Eremus Kaye asked with interest.

"Philip is in England. I came out first to find a place where I could make a home for him. He has been an invalid for five years, but the doctors say he might grow up into strong manhood if only he could live in a dry climate," she answered, her voice a little unsteady as she thought of the poor boy in his loneliness, impatiently waiting in the little cottage at Leaview for her to find a home for him in the land of promise.

"What can you do?" asked Eremus Kaye with a heavy frown, which meant absorbing thought, but that Helen mistranslated into boredom and utter weariness, and resented accordingly.

"I have been brought up on a farm, and can do most things indoors and out according to English methods," she said stiffly. "But agriculture is carried on so differently here that I think it will be wiser to take a situation before buying land on my own account."

"Decidedly! Can you ride?" he asked, with quite disconcerting sharpness.

"Yes," she admitted, modestly enough, yet with a ring of confidence in the monosyllable that said more for her ability than a whole string of descriptive adjectives could have done.

"Then I think you cannot do better than leave the matter in my hands for a few days—perhaps a week. I fancy that I know of an opening in Southern Alberta which might suit you perfectly for a time," he

said, with all trace of gloom vanishing from his face as swiftly as it had descended upon it.

"You are very kind," Helen replied, a little stiffly still, for it did not please her to be indebted to strangers, more especially strangers of the sterner sex; but for Philip's sake she could not wholly flout a chance like this.

He smiled at her frosty manner, then hastened to explain somewhat his interest in her. "Mrs. Kaye was really distressed that you left her before she had a chance to discover your name and address, so I undertook to interview Betty Mason on the subject. She, however, had been called away home with her mother owing to her father's illness, so I had to write for my information, which, even when it came, was incomplete, as it gave only your name and not your address. But now that I have so happily stumbled upon you, perhaps you will call upon Mrs. Kaye, or at least permit her to call upon you."

A wave of crimson surged into Helen's face. "I do not think Mrs. Kaye would care to call on me, or to in any way make my acquaintance," she said proudly. "For I am only cook in the house of Mrs. Rodway of Pine Avenue."

The smile on the face of Eremus Kaye broadened into a laugh. "Then you are much more famous than you think, for Mrs. Rodway is always boasting of her marvellous English cook, and those of her friends who have had the privilege of a dinner invitation declare that, for once, the lady has not exaggerated on the subject."

Helen's lip curled. She was thinking of the plentiful abuse that had been poured upon her in private by the lady who had so praised her in public, of the

numberless indignities connected with her servitude that were so fretting to a proud girl like herself; but she only replied carelessly: "Cooking is easy enough if only one has the patience to follow prescribed rules. It is well-paid work too, but it has its drawbacks."

"So I should imagine, and I do not wonder that you prefer farming," he said; then, seeing she was making a move towards departure, he asked: "You will wait a week or ten days before settling on any new course, will you not?"

Helen looked dubious. "My engagement with Mrs. Rodway expires in two weeks. If I have no line in life decided on by that time I shall be stranded on my own resources, with no alternative but to take another situation as cook. Meanwhile Philip is eating his heart out in England, waiting for news from me."

"The time need not be wasted; you can be looking out as vigorously as you please. I am only asking you not to settle too hastily," he replied, holding out his hand in a frank, friendly fashion, which Helen, despite her fear of Mrs. Grundy, could not withstand.

The little encounter had done her good. She no longer felt so hopelessly lonely, a stranger in a strange land; and when she stepped out into busy King Street, to take a car to the avenue, her heart felt quite light in comparison with what it had done for days past.

The next few days dragged terribly, as hope and fear struggled for the mastery in her breast. Usually her work made too many demands on her time to admit of much moping, but it so chanced that Mrs. Rodway was from home for two or three days, her

work in consequence slackened, and she had too much time for chewing the bitter cud of reflection.

Then came the return of Mrs. Rodway, and the bustle of preparation for festivities on an unusually large scale. A married ladies' lunch was the first item, an institution borrowed from the American side of the frontier, but amazingly popular in the leisured circles of Toronto; then came a girls' tea-party, to which the lady of the house had invited every pretty girl of her acquaintance, filling her rooms so full that it was almost impossible to move in any direction without damage to someone's finery. The day after this gathering came a big dinner-party, taxing Helen's resources to the utmost, and keeping her so busy from early morning until late at night that she had no time for making plans, for moping, or even for thinking of Philip and worrying on his account.

The morning of the next day brought her a letter in a strange handwriting, and as no one except Philip had written to her since she set foot on Canadian soil it was small wonder that she turned the envelope over and over before breaking it open.

But the post-marks were too blurred to be legible, and as the handwriting conveyed nothing save the impression that the writer was a girl young and vigorous, she finally tore open the envelope to discover the nature of the contents.

Then a cry of amazement escaped her, for the letter was from Tentover Ranges, the writer being Caryl Mason, and its tone was so friendly and kind that a little sob escaped Helen, despite her usually well-balanced composure.

"Mr. Eremus Kaye has written to us concerning

your desire to start farming out west (so ran the letter), and we have been wondering if you would like to come and work with us for a few months before starting on your own account.

"Of course farming would be very different here to what it is in England, and you would find it advantageous to learn the ins and outs of things before taking up land of your own.

"I must have someone to help me, because my father has been invalided through an accident. The work will be hard, constant, and not always very clean, but I shall not ask you to do what I would shrink from doing myself.

"We can offer you twenty dollars a month and your board, or, if you would like to bring your brother, and occupy a tiny little cabin we are having built near the flume, a short distance from the homestead, we will pay you forty dollars a month without board.

"If you decide to come, we shall be glad to have you here as soon as possible, as it is almost the busiest time of the year, and I am very hard driven. My sister Betty, who has already made your acquaintance, begs that you will come; she says that you will be sure to like us.

"Sincerely yours,

"CARYL MASON."

"Oh, how perfectly delightful to be able to have Philip with me!" Helen cried as she turned the letter over, reading it through a second time. "I wonder what a flume is; some kind of a chimney, I should think. Only, chimneys of any magnitude would

scarcely be required on a ranch. But I will write and accept to-day; or perhaps I had better wire, it will save time. Then I must write to Philip to bid him to be ready to start in a fortnight. And after that I must go and buy myself a serviceable riding-skirt, perhaps two. What a lovely sensation, to sit a horse again, and feel the wind rushing past! I think it was a very good thing this letter did not come yesterday, for I should certainly have spoiled that dinner."

The wire to Tentover was duly despatched; a letter was written to follow it. Philip was warned to be ready for flight in two weeks' time; and then Helen bethought her of Eremus Kaye and his good offices in the matter of her going west.

"Now, what ought I to do?" she cogitated. "I cannot possibly go and call on Mrs. Kaye, even if I knew her address, which I do not; for she must know where I live, from her husband, and it is the extreme of snobbery in her to have ignored me in such a fashion if she was really sincere in her protestations of gratitude, which I very much doubt."

No reasonable reply presented itself in answer to her query, though she puzzled over it more or less for a couple of days. Her sense of gratitude made her feel it incumbent on her to say "Thank you!" to the man who must have represented her case so ably to Caryl Mason, whilst her innate shyness caused her to shrink in distaste from making any effort towards discovering his whereabouts.

Then fortune favoured her, giving her the opportunity of saying "Thank you!", which she had so ardently desired, but had been too shy to make for herself. She was coming out of Eaton and Simpson's

departmental stores one morning, after her usual round of marketing, when she almost ran up against Eremus Kaye, who was entering.

"Good morning, Miss Rowlands! How soon is it going to be westward ho! for you?" he asked smilingly, as he stretched out his hand in greeting.

"I start the day after to-morrow," she said, flushing to the roots of her hair and scarcely able to speak from a miserable feeling of self-consciousness such as had never troubled her before. "But I am very glad to have the chance of saying 'Thank you!' to you for so kindly writing to Tentover on my behalf. Miss Mason says that I can have my brother to live with me, and the prospect is so delightful that I am almost too happy to live."

"You have to thank yourself, not me," he replied. "I only said what I had seen of your perfect subjugation of those bolting horses. I shall not soon forget those rearing, fighting, struggling brutes, and you hanging like a limpet to their heads, yet never losing your nerve, and quieting them by sheer force of will. But there is great trouble at Tentover, Miss Rowlands, and it is as well you should know a little of its nature before going west to become one of the family, as it were; it will better help you to realize what Caryl has to bear."

"Trouble?" Helen echoed blankly.

"Yes, and of several different kinds too. First and foremost, of course, there is this accident to Mr. Mason, who has been rendered a helpless invalid for life, I fear. Then there are money troubles, which account for the low salary they have been able to offer you. So much money has been sunk in irrigation-works that it will take a long time to pull

matters square again, I am afraid; and now, to make things worse, at a crucial moment Caryl feels that she has no one to help her whom she can thoroughly trust."

"I thought she had a mother?" Helen's tone was distinctly a query, for she was wondering if she had been mistaken in the confusion of that morning in supposing the beautiful lady to be Betty's mother.

"Oh, yes, she has a mother; but Mrs. Mason is—well, how shall I describe her? I think she is too ornamental to be really useful, and then just now she is, of course, very much occupied with her husband. I had a long letter from Betty yesterday, and so I am unusually well posted in news of Tentover."

"Then you knew all about my going?" said Helen in surprise, for she had fancied that she was telling him news.

"All but the date of your start, and that you told me; but I shall not say good-bye, only *au revoir*, for I also expect to journey to Tentover later on in the summer."

CHAPTER IX

THE COMING OF HELEN

CARYL MASON awoke in the morning with the feeling that something pleasant was going to happen. Then, remembering that it was the day on which her new assistant might be expected to arrive, she sprang up in a great hurry, for there were a number of things she desired to do before the girl from Toronto came into residence, and the early morning was all the leisure she could secure for doing anything inside the house.

For the present, that is until Philip should arrive, Helen was to live at the homestead, since it would not be possible for her to start housekeeping on her own account, and live alone in the little cabin in course of erection at Swallow Creek. This arrangement would stretch the resources of Tentover to their fullest extent; for, with two invalids in the house—and Paul Sutton was not able to be moved yet,—the rooms were all taken up, and the only place for Helen was to share Caryl's room, whilst Betty went to sleep in Beulah's chamber.

The necessity for this was eminently distasteful to Caryl, who was very fastidious, and hated, moreover, to have her privacy invaded. But since it had to be, the only thing to be done was to bear the infliction as pleasantly as possible, and to hope the new-comer might prove an agreeable companion.



B 35t

HER MOTHER STAYED TO TALK ABOUT THINGS IN GENERAL

Page 98



Caryl had been compelled to face too many hard things during the past few weeks, to spend many regrets on a minor discomfort such as sharing her bedroom with a stranger, and the immediate future bristled with so many perplexities for her that the prospect of someone to help her in the daily toil of oversight was very welcome indeed.

The bills for the pretty things brought from the city by her mother had totted up to such an alarming total that Caryl knew the resources of Tentover would be seriously crippled for two or three years to come, even if the seasons were good and no disasters followed, whilst an outbreak of disease in the cattle on the ranges, or a break-down in the irrigation system, might easily spell ruin for them all.

It was to prevent any mishap to the water-supply that she had taken the course advised by Grip Alderson, and, buying a wooden house cheap in Lethbridge, was having it erected close to the flume, so that the crucial point of the system might not be left defenceless and at the mercy of evil-doers.

Her main concern just now was in the pruning down of all outside expenses, and she had already shocked her mother by suggesting that Betty should not be sent back to school in Toronto, but be taught at home for the next two years.

"Oh, Caryl, that is surely not kind!" exclaimed Mrs. Mason. "Think of the years you spent in Toronto, and the splendid education you had; Betty certainly deserves the same advantages. I should hate to make such a difference between two sisters. And then, you know, a girl is not considered good form unless she has been through a fashionable course of study."

"Dear Mother, it cannot be helped; and Betty, I am quite sure, will be the last person to complain when she hears that she is not to return east. It would almost break her heart, I verily believe, to leave Father as he is now. I hate to worry you about money matters, but I must make you understand it is of vital importance that we live in the most inexpensive way possible for the next few years," Caryl replied earnestly. She had just been clearing out drawers and presses to make room for the new inmate, when her mother, who had also risen early, had come into the room and stayed to talk about affairs in general, and Betty's return to school in particular.

"Are things as bad as that, Caryl?" cried the poor lady, collapsing on to the big ottoman by the window, and clasping her beautiful white hands, whilst the baffled helplessness of her expression was a piteous sight to see.

Caryl hesitated. Her father had always been so careful to shield her mother from cares of finance, and had done his utmost to meet all demands for money with uncomplaining cheerfulness. But circumstances were altered now, and it might be the saving of much trouble in the end for her mother to know at once how seriously involved they were.

"We are in a very straitened place just now, Mother; but if we can pull round the next two years without having to sell any of the land we may be very prosperous again. Of course things would be easier if I were a boy; but that is a matter that cannot be altered, so we must make the best of it; and if this girl Helen Rowlands is the prodigy in petticoats that Eremus Kaye promises we shall find her, the scheme should turn out a brilliant success."

"But if we are so poor, how was it you undertook to pay her forty dollars a month? Think of what that will mount up to in a year!" Mrs. Mason cried, with a restless movement of her beautiful incapable hands.

Caryl winced; and it was on her tongue to say that her mother's three months' stay in Toronto had cost considerably more than Helen's salary would mount to in a year, but the words were not uttered. Instead, she set to work gently and patiently to explain her need of a helper with whom she could associate on equal terms.

"There is more work than I can do. If I were to break down for even a few days, I cannot answer for the consequences to the business. Then I cannot trust either Lester or Forbes farther than I can see them, and sometimes not so far as that; whilst Sutton is only a boy, and may not be fit to do anything for weeks to come. Even then he may not choose to stay, for he has made an enemy, and a very bitter one, so it may be just as well that he should go right away when he recovers."

"What enemy?" demanded Mrs. Mason in surprise.

"Long Jim. A fierce-natured man like that will not forgo his revenge just because a boy has tried to bully him. It should be the great satisfaction of our lives just now that Father is a helpless invalid, since it means that he will be safe from attack by this desperado," Caryl replied, with a quivering break in her voice.

"But the police, can't they do something?" asked Mrs. Mason, breathing hard as if she had been running.

"Not much, I am afraid," said Caryl with a shake

of her head. "Of course if they caught him he could be arrested on the charge of wounding Paul Sutton. But the difficulty will be to find him, I expect.

"Why does he want to be revenged on your father, and what for?" Mrs. Mason asked. Her face was white and drawn, and the look of helpless trouble on it a piteous thing to behold. She seemed formed only to flourish in the sunshine; difficulty of any kind crushed her; but her daughter was cast in a stronger mould, which was a happy thing for them both.

"That is what puzzles me. Father seems equally in the dark as to the motive of the man. Probably he is taking the stand of some of the other rangers, and resenting the irrigation innovations. Sutton must have been mistaken in thinking it had something to do with a will long ago, for Father is quite sure he had never seen Long Jim until the man came seeking work here nearly four years ago, half-starved and the picture of misery."

"It is all hopelessly bewildering, and I can't think what is going to happen to us, for it is not possible that you can manage this great ranch alone, Caryl, and I can only see ruin in the near future," sighed Mrs. Mason.

"Oh, it will not be as bad as that, Mother; not if we are careful. I am not a novice at managing, you know, and I have kept the books ever since I came home from school."

"But if you are out in all weathers your complexion will go. It must, for no skin can stand exposure to sun and wind without coarsening, and then where will be your chance of a good marriage?" There was a querulous ring in Mrs. Mason's tone now, for she had set this goal of a brilliant city alliance

before her eyes as the one desirable end to all her ambitious strivings on her daughter's behalf; and if they were to remain always buried in the depths of the country, then how was this desirable end to be achieved?

Caryl laughed merrily. Being perfectly heart-whole, this side of the question failed to appeal to her in the least.

"There is no necessity to worry about marriage yet awhile, Mother, and if there were, I would rather not be chosen for the delicacy of my skin. Now I must go, for I have so many things to see after that I shall hardly get done in time to meet the cars at Lethbridge if I don't hurry."

Despite her endeavours, Caryl found, as the day wore on, that it would be exceedingly inconvenient for her to leave home that afternoon, and accordingly went indoors to see what other arrangements could be made.

It did not accord with her ideas of the fitness of things to send only a man with the team to the railway, and she was forced to fall back upon Betty as a substitute for herself. But the little girl could not drive so far alone, therefore, if possible, Beulah must go too.

For a wonder, Beulah was quite willing to do this, and the two started off in high spirits when the early dinner was cleared away, driving Charley in the little wagon.

Caryl saw them start; then, mounting her own horse, set off in the opposite direction to oversee some fencing work that was going on at the side of the canal.

Fencing was fearfully expensive work in a country

where labour was scarce and highly priced; but where agriculture trod on the heels of cattle-ranging it had to be done, and well done too, for some of the young steers could jump like kangaroos.

Gradually working round, from one point to another, she rode down into the valley of Swallow Creek, beyond the bend which hid the flume from sight, and was coming slowly along by the edge of the little stream, which was fast dwindling already to a mere trickle of water winding through a bed of rushes, when, turning the angle of the bank, she saw a sight which seemed for the moment to make her heart stand still.

There were no men at work on the little wooden house, which was perched in a conspicuous place near the bank of the canal, for all available hands had been told off to the task of fencing; consequently the spot was deserted, or supposed to be.

But the sight that Caryl saw was that of a man perched on one of the middle trestles of the flume, and hacking away at the wooden supports which kept the water-trough in position.

With a wild cry to him to desist, she urged her horse to a gallop, riding at top speed along the rough ground of the creek bed, entirely forgetful that she was unarmed, the spot one of the most solitary for miles round, and the man she had to deal with a fearless and dangerous miscreant.

But he had seen her coming, and was plainly not disposed to stay and parley with her, for he commenced to descend the trestling with the speed and agility of a squirrel, coming at last to the bottom with a sheer drop of six feet or more.

A moment he lay as if to regain his breath, then,

scrambling to his feet, ran round to the other side of the big trestle framework where a horse was tethered, mounting which he rode off at a hard gallop before she could come up with him.

But the man was Long Jim; of that she had not a moment's doubt, knowing him as she did so well, and remembering the peculiar way he had of throwing himself on to his horse, an accomplishment learned in Texas, and by no means easy of acquirement.

She pulled her horse up then, and sat watching him ride away over the billowy rolling grass land, which stretched for miles and miles in that direction, with never a human habitation or a tilled field to break the wilderness monotony, and where the only things to be met with were grazing cattle and horses, which ranged at will almost from one end of the territory to the other.

There was no sense in following the man; she could do no good if she did, but was very likely to come to harm, for probably he had a revolver, and what could she, an unarmed girl, do in an encounter with such a man!

Her immediate concern was regarding the safety of the flume; and, putting her horse back a little, she sat shading her eyes and carefully surveying the part of the structure where the man had been hacking at the support.

The channel of the flume consisted of a series of semicircular iron plates bolted together so firmly that the water could not leak through in its passage across. But the strength of these plates consisted in their being kept perfectly rigid, and if the supports were knocked away a leakage would soon follow.

There was no sign of dropping water yet, of that

she was quite sure, but the support was almost out. Another ten minutes and she had been too late to save the flume from needing very extensive repairs.

What was to be done? A minute longer she sat, steadily surveying the great framework; then, taking a sudden resolve, rode closer up to the spot from which Long Jim had dropped, and, standing on the back of her horse, succeeded in swinging herself up into the framework.

She had carried off the silver medal for gymnastics two years in succession at school, so the task of swarming up the framework did not present insuperable difficulties, though she was fearfully hampered by her long, clinging riding-skirt.

Long Jim had left his iron-headed mallet lying on the ledge by the support he had been knocking out when he had slid down so hastily at the sight of Caryl.

Seizing this in one hand, and gripping the framework with the other, she commenced, with sharp, ringing blows, to knock the support back into place again.

The work took longer than she had expected, for although her arm was young and vigorous it lacked the muscular strength of Long Jim's. But her perseverance was at length rewarded, and, tossing away the heavy mallet, she proceeded to wriggle down after it. Her limbs were trembling now from the long strain of hanging on, and it was with great difficulty that she managed to swing herself from one section of the framework to the next.

Her horse was standing where she had left it, and, with a sob of thankfulness, she stepped on to the saddle, slipped, and would have fallen to the ground

but that a strong arm seized her in an iron grip, lifting her safely down.

A sharp cry of terror broke from her then, for she thought Long Jim had come back to complete his nefarious work, and had caught her unawares.

"I was afraid I should frighten you, but I did not dare speak before," said a voice that she knew very well, and, catching sight of the uniform of the mounted police, she was instantly reassured.

"Oh, Mr. Alderson, you did frighten me!" she panted when she had recovered breath enough to speak coherently.

"I knew I should. But I was afraid to speak before, for fear lest you should slip through being startled whilst you were higher up. Whatever possessed you to climb up there, and with no one here to help you?" he asked, with considerable disapproval in his tone, for he objected to unnecessary risks on principle.

She told him then how she had found Long Jim doing his best to wreck the flume, and, having scared him away, had set herself to repair the damage at once, so that there should be no disturbance of the water-channel.

"Well, don't do it again; the risk is too great for any girl to take," he rejoined brusquely, for the sight of her slight figure clinging to the framework, and raining blows on the protruding support, had been more of a strain on his nerve than he cared to admit.

"I have done more serious climbing than that," she replied with a laugh, telling him with pardonable pride of the past exploits which had won her the silver medals.

"All the same I would not advise your doing such

a thing again," he insisted, with a shiver; and then in a business-like way he pulled out his note-book and jotted down the details she gave him of the attempt on the flume.

"We may run him in in the course of a day or two, but if we don't, I should suggest the advisability of your offering a reward—not a big one, but just sufficient to induce his confederates, if he has any, to betray him."

"Very well; I shall be repaid for the outlay in peace of mind, perhaps," she said, with a rather wan smile. "But for the present I should be grateful if you forbore any mention of my adventure in the hearing of my people. My Mother is quite painfully nervous, and Father does grieve so over his helplessness that I should hate to add to his burden of care."

"There is no need to say anything at present," he rejoined as he helped her into her saddle. "But take care of yourself, and don't overwork, for you are an important person at Tentover just now, Miss Mason."

"I hope I always shall be, for somehow I cannot endure the thought of taking a back seat under any circumstances," she said, settling herself in the saddle.

"Where are you going now?" he asked, pausing a moment with his hand on her horse's neck.

"Home, as quickly as I can, for I have an assistant coming to-day, an English girl who wants to learn how we farm in Southern Alberta, with a view to setting up on her own account later on. Her brother is coming out from England to join her in a week or two, and then they will live together in that little brown house, and I shall sleep in peace with regard to the flume."

"You may do that as it is, for I will tell off some-

one to keep an eye on the place for a few nights until we can succeed in reckoning with Long Jim. I hope your scheme of an assistant will work well."

"It ought to do," laughed Caryl, giving the reins a gentle shake; "for if Miss Helen Rowlands is half as clever as our Toronto friend, Mr. Eremus Kaye, declares her to be, she is very much of a prodigy."

Grip Alderson stood looking after Caryl, as she rode away up the long slope, with an expression of pure amazement on his face. Then he turned to secure his own horse, which was tied to the framework at the other side of the flume, and as he went he muttered to himself: "The coincidence is wildly improbable, for there may, for aught I know, be a dozen English Miss Helen Rowlands, and every one of them with a brother; but stranger things are happening every day in the week."

CHAPTER X

THE ROUND-UP AT DRIFTWOOD CREEK

HELEN had been a fortnight at Tentover, and in another three days she expected Philip to arrive.

Already the new and congenial life had made a great change in her appearance, whilst the prospect of a speedy reunion with her brother had brought a glow of happiness to her face which it had not worn during her weeks of toiling in a Toronto kitchen.

Being both by taste and training a thorough-going outdoor girl, her work at Tentover suited her to perfection, and she did not intend standing second to Caryl in the matters of alertness and activity as soon as she could get to understand methods of work in the irrigated country.

Sutton was by this time well enough to potter round after the horses, or ride to field on a patent weed-scratching machine, but he would not hear of going away to avoid any more encounters with Long Jim; and when one day Caryl remonstrated with him because of the risk he might be running by remaining in the neighbourhood, he replied to her with a laugh:

"Oh, there is no necessity to worry about me, Miss Caryl! If Long Jim comes my way, and shows up rough, I'm quite prepared to down him; and if he should chance not to get up again, it will be merely a case of justifiable manslaughter;" and his right hand

went with a significant movement to the revolver he wore rather ostentatiously in his belt.

Caryl shivered. "I don't like to hear you talk of shooting a man, Sutton. Why, you are only a boy," she said with a touch of severity in her tone.

"I do a man's work, and take a man's pay, Miss Caryl, and so I don't think my youth ought to be flung at me in that fashion," the lad answered in an injured tone. "But I am not the only one who will give Long Jim a warm reception if he shows up anywhere near Tentover. Lester and Forbes have both taken to wearing barkers, and they have both a good reputation for straight shooting."

Caryl nodded, but said no more; only, as she turned away, her heart was lighter than it had been for many days, Sutton having unconsciously given her the very assurance she needed so badly concerning the fidelity of her two stockmen. It was a comfort also to think that Long Jim would be likely to meet such uncompromising animosity if he happened to show himself in the neighbourhood, for such tidings always spread, and might perchance serve to keep him away.

So far as she knew, no one saving herself and Grip Alderson were aware of Long Jim's recent attack on the flume. The police had failed to find any trace of him, although they had scoured the district, and as the irrigation company had agreed to share with Caryl the cost of a watchman for Swallow Creek until such time as the little house by the flume should be tenanted, it had been decided to let the question of a reward for his arrest stand over for a time.

Helen had been out to feed the poultry very early in the morning, and to take a look at the field of sugar-beet, to which the water had been let in for some hours

on the previous day by Sutton, who was attending to the work of irrigation because, owing to the injury to his shoulder, he was not yet fit to ride.

She was simply amazed at the growth of the little plants, which yesterday had been poor dusty specks of vegetation with scarcely a particle of life in them, but were this morning showing strong growing shoots of nearly twice the size. Hurrying back to the home paddock she caught Charley and, mounting him, jumped the low bars into the great paddock, and, riding briskly round, drove up four horses for herself and Caryl, both of them having a hard day to face, when two horses each would be a necessity.

Lester and Forbes were away on the ranges, the spring round-ups this year lasting well into the summer, and, as it was very uncertain where they might be, Caryl had determined to ride over to Driftwood Creek herself, where a small local round-up was going on, in order to ascertain how many of the Tentover cattle were to be found there.

Helen was to accompany her, for more fresh milch cows were needed at home, and they had determined to drive a small bunch of cows and their calves back with them to Tentover, if enough of their own brand were to be found in the Driftwood Creek district.

Driving up the horses, she caught and tethered them, then went into the house for breakfast, which Beulah had spread for the two girls in the kitchen.

The sputtering hiss of frying eggs and the fragrance of well-made coffee came as very pleasant greeting to Helen, who was unusually hungry, and she drew her chair up to the table, commencing her meal without any ceremony of waiting for Caryl, who had not yet appeared. On busy days like these no one waited for

anyone else, but used every moment to the best possible advantage.

Caryl did not enter for some time, and when she did, her face was pale and weary, with an anxious worry in her eyes, which were red, as if from crying.

"You are not very well this morning?" Helen said, with a touch of very real concern, for she had already grown to love Caryl Mason, despite the short period of their acquaintance, and had decided that she had never worked side by side with anyone whom she liked better.

"I am tired, I think, but nothing worse. I have been with my father for the last hour, and his acute depression this morning has infected me, I am afraid," she answered, with a sad little smile, her quivering lips telling their own tale of the struggle she was having to maintain her self-control.

"Is he worse?" Helen had pushed her chair back, and was briskly moving about attending to the wants of Caryl, pouring out coffee, and heaping delicate golden-brown morsels of scrambled eggs on to her companion's plate.

"No; indeed, if anything, I think he is a little stronger. But it is such a heavy trial to him to lie helpless in his room whilst I ride about the country in this fashion. My mother feels it too," Caryl added with a little perceptible hesitation.

Helen nodded with perfect comprehension, then answered with an air of easy indifference, as she rapidly cut corned-beef sandwiches for their use during the day: "Some things have to right themselves with time, and this is one of them. You cannot tell your mother that the rough-and-tumble of your present life will not deteriorate and coarsen your

character, because no words would convince her; but as the months go on, and she sees that you do not change, she will begin unconsciously to be reassured concerning you. No honest work can possibly degrade a woman, though, alas! many a woman degrades her work."

Caryl laughed. "I wish my mother could hear you. I think the reassurance would begin straight away; and then my dear father would be happier too."

"I think I must tell Mrs. Mason what they call you in Lethbridge," Helen replied; and there was a merry twinkle in her eyes as she divided the sandwiches into equal portions and tied them up in neat parcels. "You are known in the town everywhere as the Lady of Tentover, and if you were a duchess in your own right you could not possibly be spoken of with greater respect."

Caryl's pale cheeks became instantly crimson, and she laughed in a nervous, rather conscious fashion as she replied: "People are very kind, and I think it would do my mother good to see how nicely I am treated, but, as you say, there are some things which only time can put right. And now, if you are ready, we will be off, for it is no joke driving cows and calves from a round-up, I can tell you. I have several times helped Father, but have never undertaken a drive on my own responsibility before."

"I am ready," Helen replied briskly, for after her experiences in Mrs. Rodway's kitchen the expedition savoured more of play than hard work.

It was still early when the two girls rode forth, each leading a spare horse, and each with a water-bottle and lunch-bag strapped across her shoulders.

The horses being fresh, the first few miles were

taken at a pace that did not admit of much conversation, and neither of them was sorry when the horses slowed down a little to mount a slope of rough ground where this season's grass was working its way up through the dead, matted growths of a year ago, into which the hoofs of the horses sank as into a sponge.

"Oh, I have a piece of news for you!" said Caryl. "I should have told you last night, only I forgot it. Eremus Kaye is coming in a fortnight to spend a couple of months at Tentover."

"Indeed! That will be very pleasant for you all. Does Mrs. Kaye come with him?" Helen asked.

"No; why should she?" asked Caryl in a mystified tone, turning to look at her companion in surprise.

"I don't know, I am sure, except that wives often do accompany their husbands on vacation outings," Helen replied serenely, as she flicked a bunch of flies from the ears of her horse.

"But Eremus Kaye has no wife. Did you think he had?" demanded Caryl in wide-eyed surprise.

"Naturally; otherwise where does Mrs. Kaye come in, and all those babies who were so nearly run over?"

"Mrs. Kaye is his stepmother. Mr. Kaye, senior, married again when Eremus was grown-up, and he died when the youngest of the family of four babies was a month old, since when Eremus has had to be father to his own step-brothers and -sisters—there are two boys and two girls,—and anything but an easy task he must have found it, for Mrs. Kaye is a bad manager and very extravagant."

"They are not rich people, then?" said Helen in surprise.

"By no means. But they are in the very best set of Toronto society. Old Mr. Kaye was a thorough-going

aristocrat, and the first Mrs. Kaye was also of exceedingly good family. The second Mrs. Kaye is the daughter of a University College Professor, and is supposed to be a very cultured woman; but I do not care for her." Caryl's lips tightened into firm lines as she spoke, and Helen nodded sympathetically, for she also did not care for Mrs. Kaye, although her acquaintance with the lady was of the slightest possible description.

The horses had reached the top of the rise by this time, and broke into a canter again; for away in the distance great bunches of cattle could be seen, some feeding quietly, others rushing hither and thither in frantic efforts to get away from the men on horseback, who were driving them towards the branding corrals, which were fenced enclosures in the middle of the plain.

"It certainly looks lively," remarked Helen, as they neared the scene of the operations.

"You will find it as lively as it looks, too; so be thankful that you and I have not the work of cutting-out to do, only the driving home," laughed Caryl, who looked all the better for the excitement and exercise.

"I am profoundly thankful, for I do not think I should shine at the work at all, and I should hate to lash the poor things so dreadfully. But see how cleverly that man yonder is wheeling his horse in and out amongst that crowd of cows. What is he doing?" and Helen pointed away to the east, where the bunches of cattle were thickest.

Caryl did not reply for a minute, for she was straining her eyes to get a better view of the individual in question; then she exclaimed in a pleased tone: "Why, I do believe that is Lester; in which case our work will

be comparatively easy, because ^{he} ~~he~~ will convoy us and our bunch a mile or two on the way back."

Helen heard this with considerable satisfaction, for, fearless as she was with regard to horses, it took only a very mild sort of cow to put her courage to rout, and the majority of these cows appeared to be anything but mild in disposition.

Not only was Lester there, but Forbes also, and, hearing what was needed of them, they set to work at once to separate about twenty cows with young calves from the great droves of all sorts and sizes that were ranging on the plain.

"How will they know which are yours?" Helen asked, looking on at the manoeuvres with a bewildered expression on her face, whilst in her own mind she there and then registered a determination to have nothing whatever to do with ranging cattle when she started farming on her own account, but to confine herself to agriculture pure and simple.

"By the brand-mark. Experienced stockmen are very quick at that kind of thing, and every owner of range cattle has a special registered brand-mark of his own, you know. Ours is a moderate-sized M stuck through with a very big T, and stands, of course, for Mason of Tentover," explained Caryl.

"I see," replied Helen with a little nod; and then, her sight being longer and keener than Caryl's, she began pointing out several animals in the nearest mob, all bearing the Tentover brand.

The stockmen were all of the typical cow-boy class, not the reckless care-for-nothing kind of individual so beloved in a certain sort of fiction, but sober, hard-working fellows; a little rough in manner and speech perhaps, yet lacking nothing in chivalrous deference

to the two girls whose business had brought them into such an unusual scene for women to figure in.

Helen, watching them, thought bitterly enough of the difference of behaviour she had encountered in the Toronto streets from some of the gilded city youths, deciding that she would rather have to deal with the unpolished article, such as these western cow-punchers, whose intentions were so manifestly better than their manners.

When their bunch was ready for driving, the two girls dismounted, changed their saddles to their reserve horses, and rode off after Lester and Forbes, who were gradually edging the group of cows and calves in the way they were to go. It was a tedious business at first, and the progress for the first few miles about as slow as anything possibly could be; but afterwards the cows seemed to give up any desire to return to the vicinity of the branding corral, and pressed steadily forward, the calves trotting contentedly by their sides.

Then Lester and Forbes turned back, leaving the two girls to their task.

Mile after mile went slowly by, the sun scorched down, and never in all that wide horizon of treeless country was there a particle of shade to be found.

Helen tried the water in her bottle; but it was warm, like everything else, and tasted so strongly of the leather bottle, moreover, that she decided it was better to remain thirsty than to drink anything so nasty.

With delays and resting spells, long detours after vagrant cows, and hindrances of varied sorts, it was nearly four o'clock before they sighted the outlying fences of Tentover.

"I shall leave the bunch in the north paddock to-night; it will be easier than driving them nearer home, for the calves are getting very tired," said Caryl, who looked almost too weary to sit her horse.

"A very good idea; and as the bars are down, we ought to drive them in without much difficulty," Helen replied, setting her horse at a particularly restive cow, which she adroitly turned back in the way it should go. She was already becoming quite expert in wheeling, twisting, and all those other evolutions of quickness and skill essential to successful cattle-driving.

Fortunately the cows as well as the calves were pretty well tired out by this time, and so consented to press forward through the bar-place, although, as a rule, they were very shy of anything in the nature of a fence.

Caryl rode through after them, and Helen, dismounting to put up the bars, was about to follow, when Caryl exclaimed in tones of dismay: "Oh, I remember the other bars are down at Scrub Hole, a mile away. I rode round there last night on purpose to drop them, because I was not sure which way we should find it better to come to-day."

"Never mind; I will ride round that way and put them up whilst you go on home," Helen said cheerily. "Let me see. Scrub Hole is that little ditch away over there, is it not?" she asked with a swing of her hand to the north-east.

"Yes, and you can reach the house from there by the long paddock, with never a fence all the way. It is good of you to go for me. I feel just worn out," Caryl said plaintively.

"You look it. Go home and rest. *Au revoir!*"

So saying, Helen cantered merrily away, outside the boundary fence of Tentover, in the direction of a little thicket of scrub—low, stunted willow growths, little higher than an ordinary gooseberry bush—that clustered about a small ditch or creek where water was to be found in winter.

The bars she had to put up were a little farther on, but as Helen rode past the scrubby willows her attention was caught by the figure of a man prostrate on the ground under the scanty shade afforded by the scrub.

Thinking he might be ill, she rode almost close up to him, her horse's feet falling noiselessly on the matted grass. The man, who looked like a tramp, was asleep. While Helen bent forward, gazing at him with a startled look in her eyes, he lifted his hand to brush a fly from his face, thus revealing it more fully to her view. But at the sight a little cry broke from her, and, giving her horse a sharp cut, she rode away as fast as she could go.

CHAPTER XI

BETTY'S JOURNEY TO TOWN, AND WHAT SHE FOUND THERE

SOON after Caryl and Helen had started for the round-up at Driftwood Creek, Dr. Brown reached Tentover, having ridden out from town whilst the morning was still cool enough to make such exercise pleasant.

The acute depression of his patient struck him at once, whilst the fretful worry on Mrs. Mason's face was also duly noted.

"What have you been doing with yourself?" he asked brusquely, turning his back "for the present on the lady; he would deal with her later on, but his first concern was for the sick man.

"I wonder what you think I should be likely to do, Doctor, lying on this bed, helpless as a log," rejoined the patient bitterly.

"I know what you could do," the doctor said curtly.

"What is that?" asked the sick man indifferently, because, knowing he could not do what he wanted to, he cared nothing about anything else.

"You might look on the bright side of things rather more than you do at present, for you have a deal more to be thankful for than you can have any idea of. How is the pain?"

"Worse than ever. The helplessness is bad enough, but when pain is added to that, there is not much

chance of feeling thankful about anything, I can tell you," Mr. Mason replied with a moan.

The doctor's face softened then, for his heart was kindly, though his exterior was so rough.

"I guess it is baddish; but even that is a blessing in disguise, since it gives me assurance that I shall be able to get you on your feet again some day, instead of leaving you to be helpless for the remainder of your life."

"Some day, but when?" and the yearning eagerness in the sick man's tone was pathetic to listen to.

"That depends largely on yourself. If we can keep your mind easy and your outlook bright you may be up and out again in a few months," Dr. Brown answered cheerily. Then, after making various arrangements for his patient's greater comfort, he beckoned Mrs. Mason out of the room, and sent Betty to take care of her father meanwhile.

"You must have the nurse back again," he said in rather a brusque fashion, when they were safely out of earshot of the sick-room.

"Oh, Doctor, is he worse?" asked Mrs. Mason with a look of keen trouble in her eyes.

"No, he is not. He is so much better that it would be the height of folly to delay his recovery by a single day through any negligence on our part. I consented, you know, to let the nurse go as a tentative thing, because you were so anxious to nurse your husband; but it won't answer, that is plain, for you are wearing yourself out, and he is suffering in consequence."

"I have done everything you ordered," she said quickly, and with a slightly resentful air.

"Except to look bright and cheerful, which, within certain limits, is the most important thing in a case

like this. Of course you cannot look bright and happy when you are tired out; that is why you must have the nurse back again, and she must come to-day," he replied in a tone of decision.

"All my troubles have come upon me at once," the poor lady murmured, sitting down in the nearest chair and beginning to cry.

"This one trouble is heavy enough, I grant you, but I should not have thought that you had many others," the doctor answered quietly, moving in a restless fashion about the room, as if Mrs. Mason's tears annoyed him.

"Oh, most things are troubles in these days! Just think what an awful life Caryl has to live, and that after all the care and money spent on her education, whilst Betty is simply running wild."

"A good thing too! Betty is not strong. I have told you so scores of times, and warned you against letting her live in Toronto, where, naturally, the air must be always permeated with moisture from the lake. But I fail to see what there is awful in the life Miss Caryl lives. It is hard, I grant you, but that won't hurt her; meanwhile she is doing her duty, and keeping her father's mind at rest. A magnificent business woman she is too. Tentover won't come to disaster with her at the head of affairs!"

"It is such a different life from what I had planned for her!" sighed the poor lady.

"That is very likely, since we none of us can always have the ordering of our own lives, much less those of our children. Now about the nurse. Have you anyone who can drive in for her this morning. I should like to have her here by noon, so that you can get clear of the sick-room for a few hours."

"I am afraid that there is no one about except Sutton, and he may be a mile away, pottering about the irrigation ditches. Caryl and Miss Rowlands have gone over to Driftwood Creek, and may not be back until evening."

"There is Betty; she can drive," suggested the doctor.

"It is too far for the child to go alone; the road is so solitary," replied Mrs. Mason.

"That won't matter; she can drive back now, with me for an escort. I can put a horse to for her. Tell her to get her hat on," the doctor said, brushing aside objections in the masterful way he had when bent on any course of action.

In the end it was Beulah and Betty who hitched the dependable old Charley to the wagon, while the doctor went back to spend the few minutes of waiting in cheery talk with his patient.

"Shall I ride in front or behind?" he asked, coming out to mount his own horse just as Betty clambered into the wagon and gathered up the lines with an important air.

"In front, if you please; then I can imagine that I am the Empress of Russia, and you are the official who has to ride first in order to see that there are no dynamite things lying about to get killed with, you know," replied Betty, setting herself in the middle of the seat with a look of rigid determination on her face, as if she had a four-in-hand of frisky young horses to control, instead of steady old Charley, that might have been trusted to take the wagon into Lethbridge alone, and bring it back again undamaged.

"A nice easy way of settling things from your point of view, since if there are any explosives about I shall

have the first chance of going skywards. It is a pity I haven't a tin trumpet, then I could perform sundry flourishes on it, to let the public know your majesty is coming," laughed the doctor, riding on in front, whilst Charley trotted briskly after.

The journey to the town was safely accomplished, and the nurse secured, when Betty, who had some errands to do for her mother, drove up to the railway depot just as a long train of cars came in from the east.

"We shall have to wait a few minutes, Nurse, for the clerks will be too busy to attend to us," she said to the pleasant-looking woman in nursing uniform who was now perched up by her side.

"That will not matter, dear. It is always interesting to watch cars turning out, I think, though there do not seem to be many passengers for Lethbridge—only about four or five. Look at that young man over there; how very delicate he looks, and travelling alone too!" said the nurse, nodding her head in the direction of a tall, slight youth, who stood gazing about him with that air of mingled curiosity and surprise which betokened him a stranger in a strange land.

"How very lone and lost he looks, and what a lot of luggage he has for a man!" Betty said with a rather scornful air, for in her opinion it was only women who needed to take a mountain of baggage when they went on their travels.

"Perhaps he is an emigrant, though he does not look much fitted for roughing it at present," the nurse went on, her professional instincts aroused by the extreme fragility of the young stranger's appearance.

"Oh, I wonder—!" exclaimed Betty, starting up

with a sudden interest. "Please, Nurse, hold the lines for a minute. There is no need to be nervous. Charley takes no notice of trains, whether stationary or moving. But I must go and speak to that young man."

Scrambling down from the wagon in great haste, whilst a delightful thrill of excitement pervaded her being, Betty darted forward in pursuit of the delicate-looking stranger, who looked about as lost amid the bustle of the Lethbridge railway depot as if he had been the denizen of another sphere who had accidentally lost his way and tumbled down into the stirring little western town.

"If you please, sir, would you mind telling me your name?" she panted in a nervous, agitated fashion.

The tall youth looked down at Betty's eager, flushed face with a smile of amusement curving his lips as he lifted his hat in courteous salute.

"Not in the least, mademoiselle; it is Philip Rowlands, at your service;" and he bowed with a nervous flourish.

"Then you are Helen's brother, are you not?" Betty asked with a gurgle of delighted excitement, for she was picturing the sensation Philip's arrival would cause at Tentover.

"I have that privilege," Philip answered with another nervous flourish.

"Oh, how delightful!" cried Betty, extending an eager hand in greeting. "I am Betty Mason, of Tentover Ranges, and Caryl's younger sister, you know. I can drive you out now, with Nurse and myself, if you would like to come."

"I should like it very much. I was just wondering if I could manage to walk, though I am not very

great at that kind of thing, and it is a distance of some miles, is it not?" Philip asked, thinking that if the rest of the Mason family in any way resembled this little maiden, Helen had been uncommonly fortunate in her settlement.

"We are seven miles from the town. But I don't think I can take all that luggage to-day, for I have only the little wagon and one horse. Please choose which you need most, and the rest shall be sent for to-morrow," Betty said, with a doubtful look at the number and size of Philip's trunks.

"I don't need anything but this bag, so it remains with you whether they shall all be taken or all left," he answered with a smile so like to Helen's that all question of his identity would have been settled in Betty's mind even if he had not told her his name.

"We can take two of the small ones—those two, I think—and then the rest can come to-morrow. I am so very glad I chanced to come to the depot this morning," Betty said, as she led the way to where Charley and the wagon waited, introducing her friend with a triumphant air to Nurse Simpson, and explaining who he was. Then, turning to him with a puzzled look, she asked: "How is it you have reached here three days before Helen expected you?"

"I sailed by an earlier boat. Helen told me to come by the *Olympic*, but I came on the *Western Star*, which sailed three days sooner. I was quite ready to start, you see, and I had the feeling that if I did not get off soon I might be ill again, and not able to come at all," Philip answered rather jerkily, for it was almost a torture, even now that it was over, for him to recall all that he had suffered, in those days before leaving England, from fear that

he might even then fail at the last moment, and be unable to lift his head from the pillow.

Betty looked at him with a sympathetic air. "It must be very bad for you not to be strong, but Helen says that you are very, very clever."

Philip shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "Brains are of little use without strength to use them, and of late nothing has seemed so well worth having as strength; but that is mainly the way, people always want most what they have not got. What a nice place Lethbridge is! I did not imagine it to be nearly so important, though I've read every emigration pamphlet I could lay hands on for the last three years," he said with an abrupt change of subject, for he simply hated to talk of himself.

"I like the country best. The wide solitudes of the ranges, where there is nothing to be seen but grass for miles and miles; not a tree, not a stream, not an object of any kind except, perhaps, a bunch of cattle or a mob of horses feeding in the distance," Betty said, as Charley trotted briskly over the last canal bridge and turned his head towards the open country.

"Oh, Betty, what a funny idea of beauty! I don't think any landscape is pretty without trees," put in Nurse Simpson, who, a very silent person in general, could not forbear a word of protest against such peculiar tastes.

"Trees hem you in. I have lived in Toronto, you see, and so I know," remarked Betty with the air of a sage. "But where you have only the grass and the sky, and the almost limitless stretch of the ranges, there is no sense of restriction, but plenty of room to breathe."

"I should think there is. But have you only grass

and sky at Tentover?" asked Philip, who was gazing about him with keen interest.

Betty drew a wry face. "Indeed we have. There is an irrigation canal at Tentover, the ugliest ditch that ever was dug, but tremendously useful. Then there is a flume, which is much uglier than the canal, and is, moreover, at the present time the greatest care and concern of my sister Caryl. Then there is a garden by the house, with young trees and things; whilst acres of the ranges have been cut up into ploughed fields, where sugar-beet, wheat, oats, potatoes, and all kinds of things are growing."

"Then Tentover is not the wilderness?" Philip's tone was distinctly amused. He was finding Betty very entertaining, and the shaking of the wagon was not half so hard to bear as he had feared it would be.

"No, but it is next door to it; for our house and the cultivated fields around it are the last bits of civilization for miles and miles. But it won't last for long; both Father and Caryl say they are sure that in about five years' time we shall be surrounded by small holdings — one hundred and sixty acre lots, you know," Betty replied, with so much scorn in her tone that Philip laughed outright.

"It is not very nice of you to speak so disparagingly of small holdings, because I am almost sure that my sister intends going in for that sort of thing, and she might even chance to buy a plot that marched with your land, and we should feel very much embarrassed if we thought you regarded us in the light of interlopers."

"Oh, that would be different, of course! But I hope Helen won't want to buy land of her own whilst Caryl needs her so badly. My sister has everything to do

now, you know—I mean, all the ranch business—because of Father's illness," Betty said with a sigh, whilst a pathetic gravity stole over her face, for she loved her father with the whole strength of her warm, loving nature, and his pain and helplessness almost broke her heart.

A little silence fell over them then, which lasted until a long, low house, with outbuildings, showed in the distance, and Betty, with recovered cheerfulness, pointed to it with her whip, crying gleefully: "Yonder is Tentover, and behind it is the wilderness!"

CHAPTER XII

A DROP OF BITTERNESS IN THE CUP

WHEN Helen rode so hastily away from the figure sleeping in the scanty shade of the scrub, her face was set in hard lines of pain and inflexible determination, and over and over again she was saying to herself: "Philip must not come here! oh, he must not!"

Turning her horse in at the open bar-place, she stopped mechanically, dismounted, lifted the bars into their places, then mounted and rode away up the long paddock with never a backward look to see if that sleeping figure in the scrub had roused to glance after her, only the passionate, bitter cry on her lips: "Philip must not come here! oh, he must not!"

But could she stop him? According to her reckoning he should reach Canada to-day, if the *Olympic* came in to time; so there was just the chance that if she telegraphed she could stop him at Halifax. But what then?"

It was the problem of this "What then?" which made the greatest bitterness in her heart as she rode up the long paddock towards Tentover. Matters had appeared to fall out so fortunately for her, and she was so happily working with Caryl, that it seemed to the last degree cruel she should be compelled to drop all her pleasant and profitable plans to fly out into the wilderness again.

All this, too, just because she had happened upon

a tramp sleeping through the hot summer afternoon under the shade of the scrub bushes. But the tramp had a familiar face, and she had known that at some time and somewhere they might cross each other's path in this new world of the West.

But the land was so wide, and the chances of a meeting so remote, that her fears had gradually been lulled to rest, and she had almost forgotten them. This fancied security had made the present awakening all the more full of pain, and she moaned as one in acute physical suffering as she rode up the great stretch of grass land towards the long low house standing amidst its outbuildings.

It was the concentration of her thoughts on this sudden trouble confronting her which made her oblivious of the fact that a tall, stooping figure ~~was~~ standing on the back porch waving a handkerchief by way of greeting.

So absorbed was she that she did not notice the fluttering signal until she was close enough to distinguish form and feature.

Then a great cry burst from her, for here was Philip already, and it was out of her power to keep him away.

She rode up to the house gate in a wild confusion of extravagant joy at sight of her brother, and heavy, dragging pain because of that sleeping figure she had chanced upon under the scrub; and when she slid from her horse, to be clasped in Philip's arms, the tears she shed on his shoulder were not wholly tears of happiness.

"Crying, Nell? A pretty welcome to give a fellow! Do you want me to turn round and go back again?" he demanded playfully, his voice a trifle unsteady, and more than a suspicion of moisture in his eyes.

Helen's heart gave a great throb. That was exactly what she ought to want; that he should turn round and go somewhere—anywhere—provided it was away from Tentover, and that tramp out there in the scrub. But she could not say so, or even think so, in this keen joy of reunion after their long months of separation. Besides, who could tell, the sleeping tramp might be only a bird of passage who, when he awoke, would go on his way unconscious of the meeting which had so nearly come to pass, and the risk might never occur again.

Pray Heaven it might not! Helen heaved a long, gasping sob as the blissful comfort of the thought stole into her heart, and then she flung regret aside, giving herself up to the joy of the meeting.

"Oh, you dear, dear boy; to think you should have come bouncing in upon me in this fashion, just, too, when I was so weary for the sight of you that the three days yet to be waited through seemed too long to be borne!" she cried, in an ecstasy of delight at seeing him again.

Then she released herself from the clasp of his long arms, and, falling back a step, surveyed him critically from head to foot.

"What is the matter?" he asked, smiling at the dubious look on her face, and the way in which she was shaking her head in disapproval at his appearance.

"You have grown at least a foot, I should think. You are as thin as a lath, and you look as if you had spent half the time in bed."

"Naturally; we all do that, except the favoured few who manage to get on with only about six hours' sleep out of every twenty-four," he said lightly, not choosing to take her words as they were meant.

"What an aggravating boy you are!" she exclaimed giving him a playful shake. "But I want to know all about your travels, and what your first impressions are concerning this wild and woolly West."

"And I want to know where we are to live, and what a flume is, and how the water is lowered and raised in the irrigation canals, with about a hundred other things of equally vital importance. But Miss Mason says that supper is ready, that you have had no dinner, and that Mrs.—or is it Miss—Beulah will never forgive you if you keep her waiting, because the chickens are done to a turn," he said, laughing.

"I won't be five minutes; you can all commence without me," she said, beginning to unsaddle her horse, and then, slipping off its bridle, turned it free. "But I must wash my face and hands before I eat."

"Let me put these away for you," he said, trying to take them from her.

"No, no, you don't know where they go, or anything about them. Go on indoors, dear laddie, and make my excuses; I shall not be long."

Philip, however, would not stir until she was ready; then the two went indoors together, and, whilst Helen slipped away to her room to make the best toilet possible in the limited time at her disposal, Philip turned in at the kitchen door, and made himself useful to Beulah in the dishing up of supper and in carrying the dishes into the dining-room.

Supper was the principal meal at Tentover. Mrs. Mason always called it dinner, but Mr. Mason, being of simple, old-fashioned habits, greatly disliked the term dinner as applied to the evening meal, and the girls always called it supper because their father did.

The table was spread with a certain lavishness which

always characterized Tentover; the linen was spotless, and the silver bright, but there was a homely simplicity about it all which betokened country habits and country lack of conventions.

Mrs. Mason sighed as she came out from her husband's room to take her place at the head of the table. She usually did sigh at such times, for, excellent cook and manager though Beulah was, she had never learned the art of serving meals in good style; and to Mrs. Mason the style was everything and the food to be eaten an unimportant detail in comparison.

Then Betty slipped from her place at table, and, going to stand behind her mother's chair, proceeded to carry out the duties of waiting-maid with great dignity and alertness.

But Philip was not going to endure that sort of thing, and, gently elbowing Betty from her position, took her duties on himself, entertaining them all the while with stories of his adventures on the *Western Star* until they were all laughing, even Mrs. Mason being beguiled out of her despondency for the time.

"Do say how you manage it," Beulah implored of him later, when he was in the kitchen again helping her to wash the supper dishes.

"Manage what?" he asked with a genial laugh, polishing spoons with as much energy as if he had been brought up to that kind of thing all his life.

"To be so chipper in your spirits in spite of being so delicate that a puff of wind might well serve to blow you away," she said in a tone of eager curiosity.

"Ah, that is the real secret of my high spirits, don't you see!" he retorted gaily, though secretly wincing a good deal at her allusion to his fragility.

"There is no undue proportion of avoirdupois to hold

my cheerfulness in thrall and make me gloomy because of my fat. Have you never noticed how sombre very stout people are apt to become?"

"No I haven't," she said with a touch of asperity, for her own tendency was to broadness and weight, and she knew herself to be a fairly cheerful person. "So far as I have noticed, it has always been the other way about. Mrs. Mason, for instance, is as thin as a fence rail, but no one would call her cheerful, not when she is in the country at least, though they say she looks a bit brighter when she is in the city at times. Miss' Caryl, too, was getting thinner and gloomier with every day that passed until your sister came, but she has brightened up wonderfully since then."

"Helen is a cheerful person. I fancy that kind of thing runs in our family," Philip rejoined; then hurried to finish wiping the spoons, because he heard his sister coming, and guessed that she would be waiting for him.

"Are you ready, dear?" Helen asked, putting her head in at the door. "I have borrowed the little wagon to take our effects down to the cabin, so you will not have to walk."

"You ain't surely going to sleep away down there to-night, my dear child?" protested Beulah, her hands held up in horror at the mere idea of such a thing.

"Indeed we are. What is the use of having a house of one's own if one does not go to live in it?" Helen answered with a laugh.

"But it is night, almost, now, and you have been on the go all day. You must be ready to drop," went on Beulah, by no means convinced even now of the reasonableness of the arrangement.

"On the contrary, I feel as if I could easily do another day's work on the top of this without being much the worse for it," Helen said with a laugh.

"But you have nothing in the house for breakfast. Here, just wait a minute, my dear. I can put you up something for your first meal." So saying, Beulah darted into the larder, returning a minute later with a flag basket packed with nobbly bundles of various shapes and sizes, which she gave to Philip to hold, bidding him beware not to shake it.

Then the brother and sister got into the wagon and drove away across the paddocks to the little wooden house by the flume.

"I wanted to have you all to myself, dear lad; and besides, with the return of the nurse, Tentover is quite inconveniently full just now," Helen said; yet in her heart she knew that her main reason for going into residence at the cabin that night was in order to avoid a possible meeting with that tramp whom she had seen sleeping under the scrub.

"I'm jolly glad you did make the move at once, for I have had enough of hanging round in other people's places, and it will be worth something to have a home again," Philip said with such a quivering break in his voice that Helen was instantly thankful to think she had after all been unable to stop him from coming to Tentover.

"Poor laddie," she said softly, "you shall have such a petting now as shall make up to you for all that you have missed in the months since I came away!"

"Oh, I mean to take care of you now! Only until I get a bit stronger I shall have to put up with doing a woman's work while you do a man's; but I will do it well, and that will be something. I bought

a second-hand cookery-book in Liverpool, and made a thorough and exhaustive study of it on board ship; so that I'm fairly well up in what you may call the fundamentals of housekeeping science," he said with a merry wag of his head.

"There is the cabin; that little box of a house standing by the embankment of the canal," Helen said, pointing away down the long grassy slope to where the flume crossed the valley of Swallow Creek.

"What a funny place! it looks like Noah's ark with the ends cut off. Whip the horse up, Helen, I'm all impatience to see what it is like inside," he said eagerly.

"You always wanted your pleasures in such a hurry. Now I like to dally with mine, and enhance the enjoyment by a slow approach, but you jump into the heart of everything at once," she said with a laugh, yet hurrying the horse with a touch of the whip.

The little cabin was a bare-looking place both inside and out, but the brother and sister found no lack in it, and walked round with an air of proud possession, declaring it to be the snuggest little house that had ever been built.

It was a long wooden structure with three rooms, the one in the centre being larger than the other two, and serving as dining-room, drawing-room, kitchen, and scullery rolled into one. The outer door opened into this apartment, and there were two windows, one on either side of the door, while a long narrow pane of glass had been let into the opposite wall by the side of the stove, as if to afford a peep of the country in that direction.

The two bedrooms had each a window in the end

of the building, thus, as Philip remarked, giving them a view from all four points of the compass.

Helen had not spent much on furnishing, buying only the barest necessities—a camp-bed in each tiny sleeping-chamber, two rocking-chairs for the sitting-room, a table, one or two stools, a queer-looking thing which might have served for a book-case, but was in reality a china cupboard, with a few pots and pans, completed the equipment of the little house.

But it would not look so bare when their boxes were unpacked, whilst the very fact that it was their own home was sufficient to fill them with a boundless content for this night at least.

After the place had been inspected, and its possibilities enlarged upon, the brother and sister subsided into the rocking-chairs, talking of all that had happened to each other since the morning when Helen had parted from Philip on the platform of Oxford station. Being nearly the time of the full moon, they had not troubled to light a lamp, but sat with the door wide open to admit a stream of silvery radiance which made the room almost as light as day.

Presently Helen noted a weary ring in Philip's tone, and, guessing that he must be nearly worn-out with fatigue and excitement, ordered him off to bed without any further delay, then, bolting the outer door, retired to her own chamber at the opposite end of the house.

But not to sleep. The day had been too full of things bitter and sweet for there to be any possibility of slumber for her yet, and after moving about briskly for a minute or two, so that Philip should not think she was moping, she sat down on a box by the window and let her thoughts have full play.

The night was very still and warm. She could hear the sharp whirring noise of the grasshoppers, and the steady munching of the horse as it fed near the house, but that was all. There was not even the cry of a night-bird to break the profound hush.

How perfectly happy she would have been to-night but for that drop of bitterness in her cup which spoiled the flavour of the whole! It was torturing her heart now as she sat with her arms on the window-sill, and her chin pillowed on her arms, gazing out at the quiet night.

In memory she was living over painful days in her past, hours of keen apprehension and fear, when the sound of an unfamiliar step at the door had set her heart in a flutter of foreboding, and she had turned sick and faint at the thought of what she might see when she opened the door.

But Philip had known nothing of this. Please God he never should know, if only she could contrive to keep the knowledge from him!

If only she could! But as she thought of what was so near to her, or had been so near only such a few hours ago, a miserable feeling of utter helplessness crept over her, and, dropping her head lower still on her folded arms, she began to cry with slow, heaving sobs.

It was not often she yielded to her emotions, but when she did she usually went in for a thorough break-down, weeping until she had no more tears to shed!

Probably it would have been so on this night also; but before she had been crying very long, her attention was arrested by a strange jarring through the solemn hush of the night.

Up went her head with a jerk, and the stream of her tears dried at the fount as she thrust her head out through the open window and strained her ears to catch that noise again.

Her room was at the end of the house, nearest to the flume, and her choice of it had been obvious, since it was part of her duty to keep a watchful eye and ear on the ninety feet of waterway crossing the valley of the creek.

Caryl had promised to provide her with a dog, a savage, truculent creature, warranted to bite everyone saving its lawful owners and their friends, but the animal was not forthcoming yet. Indeed at the present time there were no dogs at Tentover, a mysterious epidemic having run riot among them in the early spring, killing every canine creature on the place.

But there was the noise again, a long, rasping purr-purr, like the sound of someone sawing.

With an incoherent ejaculation, which was one part fear and two parts anger, Helen sprang up then and made for the door.

CHAPTER XIII

A WORRY FROM OUTSIDE

CARYL went to her father's room as soon as supper was over, and was not visible when Helen and Philip drove away. Indeed she knew nothing of their intention until some time after their going was an accomplished fact.

The hour after supper she always spent with her father. If he was well enough they discussed the doings of the day out-of-doors, and arranged the work for the next day. But if he was in too much pain to talk, she just sat in silence by his bed, knowing that it was a pleasure to him that she should be there.

But the mail to-day had brought him a letter from England concerning the missing will of Giles Harper, deceased; and when Caryl, as usual, came in from supper, she found him quite excited and rather indignant about the matter.

"A letter from those Canterbury solicitors, Bawdrey & Nunn; read it, child, and tell me if you ever came across a more extraordinary bit of impudence," he said, holding an envelope towards her in his feeble white fingers.

Caryl took it in silence, and sat down by his side, reading it aloud, as he signified by a nod of his head that he wished her to do so.

"Dear Sir,

"We are extremely obliged by your letter *re* the missing will of our late client Giles Harper. . But we are at the same disappointed by your communication, as information has since come to hand which gives the impression that you had or were supposed to have the custody of the will."

"What a strange thing, Father! Did you have it to take care of at all?" Caryl asked, looking up from her reading.

"Certainly not, or I should have told the solicitors so, for it stands to reason that I had no interest in suppressing such a document. Moreover, I sailed for Canada directly after that; and a young man knocking about the world trying to make his fortune would be about the last person, I should say, to have the custody of such a document. But read on, child, for the farther it goes the more bewildering it gets, to my thinking."

She turned back to the page again, and continued reading, stooping a little closer over the letter, because the light was already beginning to fail.

"The other witness to the will, whose name you mentioned, Miss Sarah Dottridge, who in 1880 was acting as housekeeper to our late client, has been communicated with. Miss Dottridge is now very aged and feeble, her mental powers being somewhat impaired, but she remembers signing the will, although, unlike you, she was not made aware of its contents. She informed me that a few days after the occurrence, namely, on the first of March of the same year, her master, who was very eccentric in

many respects, brought her a cheque for a hundred pounds, telling her she might as well have it then as wait until his death, explaining that it was the amount left to her in his will, only, as her witnessing the document had nullified the bequest, he was giving it to her then. At the same time he told her that his young friend Reuben Mason was taking care of the will for him, as he trusted neither his solicitors nor his relatives, both of whom only regarded him as a sponge to be squeezed dry. You may remember that our firm was not then acting for Mr. Harper, but a London firm, Messrs. Quillett & Quill, had the management of his legal affairs.

"In addition to the information supplied to us by Miss Dottridge, in going through the papers, &c., left by our late client, we came upon the torn fragment of a letter, to whom written we have no clue, as the part containing the name had been torn away." We enclose a copy of this fragment, and, hoping to hear from you again on this matter,

"We are, Dear Sir,

"Sincerely yours,

"BAWDREY & NUNN."

"Where is the fragment, Father?" Caryl asked with a bewildered look round.

"It was in the envelope; perhaps I dropped it," he replied, making a feeble effort to push aside the coverlid and find the missing paper.

Caryl came quickly to his assistance, turning back the bed-clothes and hunting for the missing paper, which was finally found tucked away between the pillows.

The copy of the fragment was type-written and labelled "Copy of extract relating to the will of the late Mr. Giles Harper".

"I shall give you no more money, so do not expect it. You may not even benefit by my death unless you behave yourself, for I have given Reuben Mason instructions to suppress and destroy my will if he is dissatisfied with your conduct, in which case I shall die intestate, and you will only share in the pickings which the lawyers leave for you."

"Do you expect this Mr. Harper sent his will to you, and it got lost in coming, Father?" Caryl asked, when she had brooded in silence over the type-written extract.

"No, I can't think that," the sick man replied. "For in such a case he would expect the packet to be acknowledged. Of course such a thing might have been, but I can't think it likely. My own impression is that he may have intended giving the will into my keeping before I left England, laid it aside and forgot it, then imagined later that he had really done what he had only intended doing."

"It is a queer tangle altogether," Caryl said with a sigh. "And it comes at a time when we can ill afford to be troubled with outside worries. Have you told Mother about it?" she asked abruptly.

"No, there did not seem any use in bothering her with a thing she could neither help nor hinder, so I let it alone; but you can tell her if you want to," he answered with an impatient sigh. Then, after lying in silence for a minute or two, he asked in an anxious tone: "Does Dr. Brown think I am worse, that he has sent the nurse back again?"

"No, dear, no," she said soothingly, as she bent over

the bed and gathered his hands into her warm, loving clasp. "The doctor saw that Mother was not equal to the task of nursing you as you should be nursed in order to give you the best possible chance of recovery, so he ordered the nurse back again, and I am sure we are all very glad she has come."

"It is a dreadful expense," he grumbled. He had never been in the habit of spending money on himself, and few men were so sparing in personal luxuries as he had been; thus the salary of the hospital nurse seemed to him like a piece of wild extravagance.

"We think it is money well laid out," Caryl answered with a little laugh. "Daddy dear, has Mother told you? Dr. Brown hinted to her this morning that he has great hopes of your ultimate recovery; not merely that you will get well enough to be carried out to the veranda and all that, but walk about on your own feet, and perhaps even ride again."

A broken gasping sob was all the answer the injured man could give for a little while as he lay with his yearning eyes fixed on the window that looked to the west, where, just now, the sun was dropping out of sight behind the mountains.

"Shall I write to those Canterbury solicitors now, Father, or would you like the letter to be left until to-morrow," Caryl asked in a purposely matter-of-fact tone, for she dreaded lest her talk of complete recovery had excited him too much in his weakness.

"I feel it had better be left until to-morrow. I shall have more time to think out and arrange my reply. I want, too, to go back in my memory and see if I can remember if the old man in any way alluded to a wish that I should take care of his will. But it is hard to recall the sayings and doings of so many

years ago when one has lived a busy life such as I have."

"Indeed it must be; but don't lie awake in the night if by any possibility you can sleep. Better let the lawyers wait a week for your reply," she said in a gentle caressing tone.

Then he began to talk of all that had been done out-of-doors that day, asking many questions about the condition of the cattle driven home from the round-up at Driftwood Creek.

"I am sure it is a mistake to let the cows be on the ranges with such young calves, Father. Why don't we do as they are compelled to do farther north, that is, keep all the cows at home, and not turn the calves out until they are a year old?"

"Well, you see, it means a lot of extra trouble for one thing, and it would entail a proper hay-making, for cows kept on a circumscribed area could not get through the winter without help in the way of food," he answered in a musing tone.

"Still, I wish you would try it for one year at least," she urged. "There is plenty of time between now and harvest to run up a few haystacks, and there is such an abundance of grass this year. Then in the autumn we will have the cows brought home for the winter, and you will see how well my plan will answer."

"So we will. I shouldn't wonder if you beat me at farming after all, for you have a capital business head on your shoulders. The worst of it is that you are not a boy, for ranching is a hard rough life for a woman."

"It is a very enjoyable life, and not a bit too hard for me, Father dear, whilst Helen Rowlands fairly

exults in it, treating it all as a holiday. She is thoroughly capable too, does not mind what she does, and is in every way most satisfactory."

"That is good hearing indeed, for it might so easily have turned out otherwise. It is a great comfort to me that you have got a woman at your side in your work; and it will be to your mother also, when she can get used to the idea of your taking to ranching as a serious business. But just now it is a terrible trouble to her, poor dear!" and the sick man heaved a heavy sigh of commiseration for the distress Caryl's outdoor work brought to the wife he so fondly loved, and had so tenderly cherished.

"Poor Mother! I am afraid she is doomed to disappointment with regard to both of her girls," Caryl said with a little laugh; "for I should just loathe to live the life of the average city girl moving in a good set. I am a daughter of the ranges, a product of the wilderness, and I think I should pine away and die if I had to be harnessed down to the tread-mill of dining, dressing, dancing, paying calls, showing myself here, and appearing for criticism and inspection there. Oh, I couldn't do it, Father; and Betty is the same!"

There was so much energy in her tone and manner that Mr. Mason laughed in spite of himself—and it was so rarely that he could be beguiled into laughing now!—then he said slyly: "If that is the case, what is the use of Eremus Kaye coming all the way from Toronto to spend his holiday at Tentover?"

"Eremus Kaye is my friend," she replied quickly, yet blushing scarlet at the same time, "and he is only coming for rest and quiet, which I am sure he must find hard work in obtaining at home, with such a houseful of spoiled babies."

"Your mother thinks differently. It is her one satisfaction just now to think that the coming of that young man may be effectual in altering the whole course of your life," he said wistfully, his eyes lingering on her flushed face with a yearning gaze, as if he would fain read for himself the inmost secrets of his young daughter's heart.

"Then I fear there is still more disappointment in store for her, for I like Eremus Kaye too much to even love him a little, and I should be really miserable if I imagined that he had any different feeling for me," she answered, with a nervous and rather forced laugh.

"Well, well; you may guess that I am in no hurry for you to marry, and your mother isn't either, in reality, only she has such a strong desire that you should form an alliance which will launch you in a good set," Mr. Mason rejoined with a sigh which was plainly one of relief.

"It is a good thing that you do not want to get rid of me, seeing that I do not want to go—not in that way at least; though here comes Nurse to turn me out, so I suppose I shall have to say good-night and run away. Have I tired you too much, dear Father?" she asked, bending over him and kissing him lovingly.

"No, indeed! It is almost as good as being out-of-doors myself when you come to tell me how it all looks, and what is being done. For it goes without saying that I get wearily anxious sometimes."

"There is no need to worry, dear, for we are all doing our very best to keep things straight," she said, throwing him a bright, backward smile as she went out of the room, leaving the nurse to settle him comfortably for the night.

Her work for the day was by no means over yet,

and, passing into the dining-room, she lighted the lamp standing on her father's big desk in the corner of the room, and sat down to do the business writing of the day. First came the record of each person's work, then various entries pertaining to the ranch, and when this was done, she had to write various business letters.

With a little sigh of thankfulness she signed her name to the last one, then, having folded and placed it in its envelope, rose from her seat and proceeded to lock the desk.

Just then Mrs. Mason came into the room, her dress trailing with a soft frou-frou suggestive of silken linings, and her hair dressed with an elaborate care that seemed strangely out of place in that lonely ranch-house.

"Have you nearly done writing, Caryl?" she asked, with that plaintive touch in her tone which always inspired Caryl with a feeling of self-reproach, lest she had in some way failed in daughterly duty.

"I have quite done now. I hope you have not wanted me, Mother?"

"Not more than usual, dear; but it is very solitary sitting alone, and Betty went away to bed more than an hour ago," Mrs. Mason said, rustling her way across to the window, which still stood wide open, and gazing at the silvery sheen of the moonlight on the veranda.

"Has Helen gone to bed, too?" Caryl asked in surprise, for, as a rule, Helen was extremely unwilling to retire to rest until compelled by fatigue.

"Helen and her brother have gone to sleep at the cabin. It was quite ready, you see, and it was altogether nicer for them to be alone in their own home on this the first night of their meeting after such a long separation," Mrs. Mason replied.

"Perhaps it is. But I had not thought of them going away in such a hurry. You see, Philip turned up so unexpectedly to-day. What a nice boy he seems to be, but so fearfully delicate!"

"Yes, he does look fragile, but he is a thoroughly gentlemanly fellow; and I think I like him better than Helen, who somehow lacks repose of manner and the subtle grace of action which is such a true indication of good breeding."

Caryl laughed. "Dear Mother, Helen is such a thorough business woman, and so brisk and capable, that I had never even noticed her lack of repose. And her readiness to do anything and everything that I ask of her goes much farther with me than mere grace of action," she said, as she put out the lamp and followed her mother into the brightly-lighted sitting-room.

The house was very quiet and still, everyone saving her mother and herself having already retired for the night. Caryl was so tired that she also would gladly have gone straight to bed, but her mother seemed so wide awake and restless that it appeared unkind to go off and leave her just yet.

"I had a letter from Eremus Kaye to-day, Caryl, and he wants to come a week earlier than at first arranged. You have no objection, I suppose?"

"Oh, dear, no! I shall be delighted to see him. And I suppose there will be no difficulty about taking him in, now that Helen and her brother have gone to live at the cabin," Caryl said, feeling instinctively that her mother had a purpose in wanting to talk to her just now, and bracing her courage for the ordeal in store for her.

"None whatever. I have been talking to Beulah about it, and she seems quite delighted at the prospect

of his coming, though, as a rule, she is apt to turn churlish at the mere mention of visitors. But Eremus Kaye is a general favourite, I think. We are going to give him the little blue room; it is small, but sufficient for a man. Beulah says she will scrub it for me to-morrow; then I will add the decorative touches myself. It will be something to do, and I love to be useful," Mrs. Mason said, sinking into a low lounging-chair, and gently swaying a fan. There were no open windows in this room, and the heat of the two lamps made the atmosphere hot and stuffy.

"That will be a great help to Beulah, who must have her hands full to get through with the work, now there is so much extra to do. But Betty does her best, I know," Caryl replied, endeavouring to lead the conversation from dangerous topics, and beginning to hope that they might be altogether avoided.

But she was doomed to disappointment.

"Yes, Betty does work with the utmost cheerfulness; indeed she is never so happy as when she is grubbing about at housework. She actually made the bread to-day, and very good bread it is. Of course, if she prefers such a homely way of life, it may be best for her during the next few years whilst she is growing so fast. But I hope a very different future is in store for you, my Caryl," Mrs. Mason said caressingly. It was not often she spoke in such a tone, and a sudden mist came into the girl's eyes, for she loved her mother in a sense as dearly as her father, only in a different way.

"I hope so too," she answered, striving to speak brightly, though her voice was a trifle unsteady; "for I am not at all fond of what you call grubbing at housework, and bread-making I simply detest; I would

rather have to drive cows and calves six days in every week."

Mrs. Mason shivered; then, as Caryl rose to go to bed, she rose too, putting her arms round the girl and saying in the gentle, plaintive tone poor Caryl found so hard to withstand: "This hard ranch life is not good enough for you, my beautiful darling; and if, as I believe, Eremus Kaye is coming to ask you to leave it for him, oh, I implore you, be wise and consent! If not for your own sake, then at least for mine."

"Mother, I could not! Oh, please don't ask such a thing of me!" pleaded Caryl, going very white; "for I have my own life to live; and if I ever marry it must be because I love someone, and not because it would be a desirable arrangement."

Mrs. Mason sighed, then the clasp of her arms loosened about her daughter's neck as she said, in a resigned fashion: "There, go to bed, my child; I see we shall have to leave the future to take care of itself."

CHAPTER XIV

WHAT WOULD HE DO?

WHEN Helen opened the door of her room to go out into the night, she had no clear idea as to what was the right thing to do next, her one coherent thought being a desire for companionship. To this end she stole softly across the floor to the door of Philip's room, which stood slightly ajar, intending to ask him to come out with her and scare away the night marauder who was tampering with the flume.

But at the sound of her brother's even, gentle breathing she changed her mind about rousing him, and when she peeped in and saw his white face on the pillow her heart smote her at the thought of waking him to a probable fright and a possible danger.

There was no help for it; she must face the emergency alone.

Going quietly back to her room, she fumbled a minute among her belongings until she found the revolver with which it had seemed necessary to provide herself when she came west. Of course she knew it was against the law to carry firearms for self-protection, but every third person appeared to do it; and the police never seemed to take any notice so far as she had seen.

Stuffing the revolver in her belt at a convenient place for pulling it out again, and seizing a thick stick, which might also come in useful, she unfastened the outer door and stepped out into the night.



41 351

SHE CREEPT FROM SHADOW TO SHADOW

Walking quietly along in the shadow of the embankment, Helen came to where the trestles of the flume made a net-work tracery of black and silver across the narrow valley of the creek.

How she wished that she had not sent the police watcher away that evening, but let him remain for just one night.

Her idea had been to save Caryl expense. Then she had been anxious, too, to prove her own suitability for the post for which she had been chosen; a little scornful and unbelieving, likewise, concerning the necessity of such constant watchfulness with regard to this weak point in the Tentover water-system.

But now! The mere sound of that loud purr-purring of an active saw sent tremors all through her being, while the prospect of being compelled, perhaps, to engage the miscreant in a single-handed combat was almost too terrible to be faced; and it is to be doubted if she did not at that moment feel a fleeting regret that she had ever left the uneventful drudgery of a Toronto kitchen to come west to face an experience like this.

There was plenty of courage in her, however, that only needed occasion to call it into active operation, and when, creeping from shadow to shadow across that net-work of black and silver, she reached the point above which the sawer was at work, she cried out in a voice which had no suspicion of a tremor in it:

"Here, hi, what are you doing up there?"

The purr-purring of the saw stopped instantly, and from where she stood she saw a dark figure crane anxiously forward as if to see who stood below.

But she was in the shadow, whilst the figure above was silhouetted against the light, and, giving him

scanty time for reflection, she called again, her rather deep voice cutting fearlessly through the hush of that solitary place.

"If you do not come down at once I will shoot you where you are. Do you hear?"

"Hold there a minute. Who are you, and what is your business here?" called down a voice from above, and in no courageous tone either.

"I am the watcher of the flume, and I am going to arrest you directly you set foot on the ground, unless, indeed, you compel me to shoot you where you are," came the answer from below.

There was an ejaculation from above, happily inaudible to the listener below, and then the man came slipping and sliding down the great trestle-work, pausing once to peer into the shadow to discover the whereabouts of the one who threatened him.

But Helen had prepared for this by pressing so far back into the black gloom flung by the framework as to be entirely out of sight; indeed, for aught the man above could see, the challenge might have been flung out by a spectral voice from the dry bed of the creek.

"Where are you anyways?" demanded the fellow, who was now plainly puzzled, and, being decidedly a coward, frightened also.

"When you come down you will see where I am. If you do not make haste I shall have to hurry your coming, that is all," Helen said coolly, with a slight sweep of the hand which held the revolver, causing a gleam of moonlight to glance along the polished surface, and thus revealing her whereabouts to the craven above, who was slowly swinging himself from the last cross-piece to the ground.

Suddenly a sharp cry of actual terror broke from

her, as the descending man swung full into the moonlight and she saw his face plainly.

The cry had such an appalling effect on him that his grip of the timber relaxed, and, losing his hold, he fell heavily on the ground at her feet.

In an instant she was standing over him, her face so gray and ashen that her friends would scarcely have recognized her, whilst her voice had lost its full deep tones, and rang clear and cutting through the silence.

"Is it you?" she cried, with withering scorn, recognizing him for the tramp she had seen sleeping under the scrub.

"Nellie!" he ejaculated in a voice of amazement not unmingled with fear as he made a movement to regain his feet.

"Stay there," she said, motioning him to be still, since there was less likelihood of him doing her any harm in that position, and her previous knowledge of his character had taught her neither love nor respect for him, despite the fact that he was her father, and in a natural course of things should have commanded her filial devotion.

For a moment he stayed gazing at her in silence, his face filled with a great bewilderment; then he spoke again in a half-awed tone: "Is it really you Nellie? I declare at first I thought it was your mother come to life again!"

"No, no, my dear mother is in heaven, and at rest," she panted, her breath coming fast as if she had been running.

"And your grandfather, my old dad, is he dead too?" asked the man, and this time there was a trace of feeling in his voice.

"Yes," she answered, "Grandfather is dead too, and when he was dying he left you his love and forgiveness."

"But no cash as well, I suppose?" he enquired with a half-sneer.

"No, there was no money left for you," she replied, setting her lips in hard lines of pain and endurance, for this father had been the terror of her childhood and the constant cause for apprehension in her later years, whilst from that last callous question she judged him to be unaltered still.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"I am working at Tentover as assistant to Miss Mason, and it is part of my work to guard the flume," she said quietly.

"Pretty work to set a woman!" he exclaimed with a sneer and a harsh unmirthful laugh.

"It would be entirely unnecessary work but for you," she responded coldly, instinctively realizing that her father and Long Jim were one and the same man. Then she burst out with a sudden impulse: "Oh, Father, why will you always be dragging our once honourable name through the dust? It was bad enough in England years and years ago, when I was a little child, and Mother used to cry so much; but here and now it is almost too terrible to be borne. Only think, too, that if you had not come down when I challenged you I must have shot you—and you my own father!"

"Old Mason has done me an ill turn, and I've sworn to be revenged on him!" he muttered, yet wincing all the same under her passionate appeal.

"Father, can you not forgo your revenge and forgive the wrong, whatever it is?" she wailed, her voice

deep and vibrant now with the intensity of her emotion. "Every bit of the happiness I have in this world I owe to the Masons, and the blow that strikes them strikes me too. For my sake leave them in peace!"

"Suppose I won't?" There was a thrill of curiosity in his tone, and he watched her with a fascinated gaze as if he could not take his eyes from her, for she looked so much like her dead mother that it was hard to realize that it was not actually his wife's spirit returned to earth to reproach him.

"In that case I should have to do my duty, cost me what it might," she said firmly.

"What would that be?" he asked in a mocking tone, a smile for an instant curving the features which had once been so handsome, but which evil passions and hard living had distorted so cruelly.

"I should have to give information against you, and you would be arrested on the double charge of malicious damage to valuable property, and wounding with intent to kill," she said, in the weary tone of one who has reached the last stage of endurance.

"Pshaw! A charge of duck-shot in the arm of an impudent boy, and that from a gun going off accidentally, is not murder, nor manslaughter either," he replied impatiently.

"It would weigh against you, especially when taken with the other charge. Then, too, they are saying at Tentover that it was not Paul Sutton you meant to hurt that night, but Mr. Mason himself!" she said, lowering her voice almost to a whisper.

"They can't prove it," he broke in quickly.

"Perhaps not; yet it will tell against you all the same. So, you see, you have to choose between foregoing your revenge, such as it is, or giving up your

liberty for a term of years." There was a ring of decision in her voice that made him quail, reminding him as it did of his dead wife, who had showed just that kind of force of character.

"You'd never, surely denounce your own father! Why, all the world would cry shame on you," he said with a wriggle of uneasiness and a short unmirthful laugh.

"I must, unless you consent to go away and make no more attempts on my employer's property," she answered slowly and sadly, yet with the same inflexible decision of tone as before.

"How much will you, pay me to keep away?" he asked.

"Nothing," she answered firmly, knowing well that the money would be spent to no good purpose, and that while he was well and strong it was better far that he should be compelled to struggle for his living.

"Then I shall not go away," he said doggedly.

"Very well," she answered quietly; "then it only remains for me to do my duty."

"Hold! What are you up to now?" he cried in a sudden panic, for she had taken something from her pocket and was fixing it on to the revolver with which she had menaced him.

"I am going to send up a blue rocket. There is a watchman at the Lethbridge Police Barracks, and they will be here to my assistance in a very short time, for the rocket was the signal agreed upon in case I needed help."

"Don't do it, Nell. I'll go away and not trouble you any more, and old Mason's flume may stand until it drops down from sheer old age for aught of injury it gets from me. Though if it had not been for him

I might have been a rich man now, and able to ruffle it with the best of them."

"What do you mean?" she asked in blank surprise.

"Ah! that's my business, and I'm not going to tell it either," he replied bluntly; then asked in a softer tone: "Are you going to let me get clear away?"

"If you will promise to molest the place no more I will do my best to protect you from arrest. But of course I shall have to report at daybreak that I found someone making an attempt on the flume, after which search will be promptly made in the neighbourhood, and you will probably have little chance of escape, unless you are by that time far away."

"Which I shall be. There's a train going west that stops at Lethbridge about four o'clock in the morning. I can catch that if I try. And, once aboard, there isn't much chance of the police coming up with me, I guess, especially if they don't see me start."

"Very well, you can go." As she spoke, Helen stepped back, and with a fling of her hand announced that he was free to rise.

With a shuffle and a scramble the man got on to his feet again, then stood a moment hesitating, after which he said in a curiously soft, and pleading tone: "Will you kiss me before I go, for your mother's sake, Nellie? I know I've not been a good father to you, but she loved me once."

A hard choking sob struggled in Helen's throat; then she came closer to him, and, putting her hand up, drew his head down, kissing him twice. "Once for Mother and once for myself," she whispered softly.

The man was visibly moved. "Tell old Macra from me that his flume is safe all the while he has

you to take care of it. And, Nellie, I shall never forget that you kissed me freely when I asked you, and that you kissed me for yourself as well as for your mother."

He swung away then, going with long strides across the dried grass of the valley, till he was soon but a mere black speck on the moonlight-flooded earth.

Helen stood watching him disappear in the distance; then suddenly a strong rush of love and longing filled her heart. After all, he was her father, and although there had never been aught in his conduct towards her that could inspire affection in the remotest degree, it was there all the same, though so long dormant and slumbering.

"Father," she cried, her voice sounding strained and shrill even in her own ears. "Father, come back, I want you!"

But he did not stop or turn, and before she could cry out again a bend of the valley hid him from sight, and she was alone again.

Then it flashed upon her that he had never once mentioned Philip, and she stood a minute in amazement, wondering if her father had really forgotten the boy's existence, or whether some rumour of Philip's many illnesses might have reached him, inclining to the supposition that the boy was dead.

She turned back to the cabin where she had left her brother sleeping. At almost the first step her foot struck something hard, and, stooping, she found it was a saw, probably the one her father had dropped when he fell from the cross-bar to the ground.

Picking it up, she carried it back to the cabin with her, for she saw it bore the Tentover mark, and even smiled grimly to think that it should have been stolen

from the unlocked outhouses for the purpose of bringing ruin to Tentover.

But the danger was past. The meeting, too, that had frightened her so much in prospect, had come and passed too. Strangely enough, however, that fact did not bring the relief she had imagined it would. Instead, she found her heart aching with quite a new pain, and yearning over the father whose name had previously been nothing to her but a bugbear, a torment, and a constant apprehension of impending evil.

How lonely he must be, and with not even the quiet of a good conscience to keep him company! she thought, her eyes filling with the tears of a gentle womanly pity as she thought of the wanderer fleeing now from the danger of arrest.

Suppose he should not succeed in making his escape, would she, with this new love for him in her heart, have the courage to bear witness against him?

The mere thought was a torment, as the truth of her nature and her awakened affection did battle with each other striving for the mastery.

Then a subtle temptation came into her heart. No one knew of that night's experiences saving herself and her father; why need she report concerning it? There could be little real damage done to the flume, and what was wrong could easily be righted later on.

Helen flung up her arms with a gesture of impatience, as if she could endure nothing further either of physical toil or of mental tribulation; then, softly opening the door, stole across the threshold and listened for the sound of Philip's breathing.

Failing to hear anything, she thrust her head in at his door, a vague fear clutching at her heart lest he

should be ill. But he was breathing more quietly now, as his sleep became deeper, and his soul seemed farther away from his body. A moment she stood looking at him, and noting now, what she had never seen, or at least cared to acknowledge even to herself before, and that was his likeness to his father. There was the same length of limb, the same regular and handsome features; only there the likeness ended. For, while the man's soul looking out through his face was debased and degraded with years of sin and evil living, the boy's nature had been sweetened and chastened by intense suffering and the exercise of heroic self-denial.

As she looked at him, Philip stirred, roused a little, half-lifted his head, then dropped back upon his pillow with a happy smile on his face, just murmuring the one word "Father".

The sound startled Helen almost as much as if a volley of musketry had been discharged close to her ears. Why should Philip babble of a father in his sleep when he had never had a father to love and reverence, nor even the memory of one which might be regarded as a sacred holy thing?

But it was a problem too hard for her to solve, and, turning away, she crossed the middle room to her own chamber, where, flinging herself on her bed, all dressed as she was, she fell asleep at once, nor awoke again until the sun was rising over the eastern ranges, the no man's land lying beyond Tentover, and then she heard her brother stirring briskly in the middle room, getting breakfast ready.

CHAPTER XV

GRIP ALDERSON'S CHAGRIN

IT was a week after Helen's adventure at the flume that Grip Alderson came back to Lethbridge after nearly four weeks of active running to and fro in the earth on the trail of a clever horse-thief named Ling MacFarlane.

Ling had succeeded in getting clear away with a mob of a hundred valuable horses from the noted Robinson Ranch out Calgary way; and as he was known to be a past-master in the art of dodging justice, Grip Alderson had gone in pursuit himself, leaving his subordinates to take charge of minor affairs at home.

But Ling had a two days' start, and, having got so clear away, it would take a man with brains as well as endurance to catch him.

Grip Alderson had followed the profession of man-hunting so long that he was well-used to the tricks of doubling and twisting, turning back on their trails, and faking of brands which are the chief characteristics of horse-thieves, whether clever or otherwise. But he had never gone in pursuit of Ling before, and when he had twice crossed the boundary on to American territory, and twice had to hark back to Canadian soil, because he had overrun the trail, he became so absorbed in his quest that nothing in life seemed so much worth accomplishing as the arrest of the man Ling MacFarlane.

The worst of it was, every day that passed added to the difficulty of the quest, in giving Ling more time to tamper with the brands, and dispose of the horses, ten or a dozen at a time, at various outlying settlements which he visited, sometimes only a few hours ahead of the police.

By the end of a fortnight more than fifty horses had been accounted for. But fifty more, and these the most valuable of the mob, were still wandering round under the convoy of Ling, who also had the money paid over for the other animals—a sum which mounted to thousands of dollars. Plainly the star of the horse-thief was in the ascendant, and the mounted police toiling along in his rear were cruelly unlucky fellows.

Already Grip Alderson had worn out one subordinate, and the man sent to take the place of the disabled one was beginning to show signs of heavy wear and tear, but the superior never once flagged, or in any way relaxed the vigour of his efforts.

The two men were camping one night—that is, turning in all standing, their only shelter an overhanging bank of the Milk River. So hot were they on the trail that Alderson, although he had been in the saddle since daybreak, would have followed on still; but his horse had fallen lame, and there was no settlement handy from which he could requisition a mount. His companion's horse was in a similar plight, whilst the man himself lay stretched on the ground, too exhausted to ride another mile even if there had been a horse to carry him.

Grip sat on the ground by his spent comrade, chewing the cud of bitter reflection, and smoking a short black pipe. He had attended to both the horses, then hobbled and turned them out to feed. There was every

probability that they would be recovered enough for part of a day's work to-morrow, but that was a good twelve hours away, and his need of a mount was for the present time.

It was not quite dark yet. A warm, pleasant evening, which made camping a very agreeable experience even under such primitive conditions, and the tired man on the ground was fast asleep, snoring as placidly as if he were lying in comfort on a feather bed.

Suddenly Grip's head went up in a listening attitude; from somewhere, faint and far away, his quick ear had caught the neigh of a horse.

In an instant his resolution was taken, and he determined to go off and do a little scouting on his own account, whilst his companion slept and the horses rested.

Writing a message on a leaf of his note-book, he tore it out and pinned it to the front of the sleeper's jacket, then strode away in the direction from which the call of the horse had come.

The place in which they had dropped down for the night's camp was about six miles from the frontier, and eight or nine from the Great Falls railway, a weird, lonely spot, unsettled and barren, and having no good reputation either; for many a deed of violence had been committed there in days not so very long past, whilst more recently the district had figured largely as a desirable spot in which to herd cattle and horses stolen from the ranges, preparatory to disposing of them in quiet and unobtrusive ways.

Following for a mile or two the sinuous windings of the river, Grip Alderson presently found himself confronted by a low range of hills covered here and there with patches of dense, wiry scrub.

He chose to take a straight course over these hills, leaving the river winding away on his right. One plunge into the scrub, however, taught him the wisdom of keeping to the open, the thick growth being plentifully supplied with thorns of a most penetrating description.

As he was toiling up the hill he heard again the sound which had lured him out from camp, and this time the neigh was answered by another.

His heart beat a little faster then, and his steps quickened. He might have to creep on all-fours presently, but whilst it was possible to go upright it was as well to go forward as fast as he could.

The hill was steeper than it had looked, and when the top was reached there was a wide table-land to cross, which was perhaps a mile or more in extent, and well covered with prickly scrub. Presently the ground dipped suddenly, and in the moonlight he saw a valley stretching away in the distance, with here and there a sheen of silver, which showed that water was there.

But a part of the valley was in heavy shadow, and from a particularly gloomy part of it he heard an unmistakable chuckle of laughter.

On his guard now, he crept cautiously round a wide patch of scrub, finding, when he reached the other side, that he was on a little shelf or ledge of ground above a tiny encampment. A ragged old bell-tent was set up there, and in front of it a small fire still smouldered, whilst a couple of men crouched near it, playing cards in the moonlight and talking. A few horses were hobbled or tethered near, how many Grip could not see in the uncertain light, although at the first glance he knew that they were not the mob of fifty which he was looking for.

But the men were talking still, and so he crouched lower to listen. The long, shining stock of a Winchester repeating rifle, lying on the ground in the moonlight, served as a good and sufficient reason why he should exercise caution in his approach.

"I guess old Grip is getting fairly hot on our trail by this time," said a big, ragged fellow, by whose side the rifle lay, and who seemed to be in charge of the camp.

"Well, he'll get a pretty lively welcome when he gets here," laughed the other fellow, who had a harsh, cracked voice, and wheezed as if from asthmatical trouble.

"It wasn't half a bad idea of Ling's to leave a camp here, while he stole back to the railway with the horses. Wonder if he's got there yet?" the first fellow said, wetting a dirty thumb in order to shuffle the cards.

"It was a sharp thought, though, telegraphing in Billy Blore's name to Robinson's that the horses had been secured, and there was no further need for trouble," cackled the wizened subordinate, his mirth ending in a fit of coughing which nearly choked him.

"Might have been worse, since it ties Grip Alderson's hands for a time until Billy Blore can be found," the other replied, dealing his cards with a vigorous hand.

For a few minutes they cut and shuffled in silence, or with only such talk as referred to their game; then the asthmatical one, with a wide-reaching yawn, suggested that it might be well to think of turning in.

"Not for me, thank you! If I've got to stand up to Grip, I would rather be wide-awake when I begin, for

he's not the sort one cares to tackle half-awake. But you can lay down if you want to," the first fellow replied.

"Oh, I'm not that tired! and there isn't much to do to-morrow either," the other said with a yawn. "Supposin' Ling pulls this business through safely, what do you reckon he will be up to next?"

"Something bigger; trust him for that. But he will have to be careful, for Grip Alderson ain't no child's play; and I wasn't going to take the risk of an interview with him until Ling made it worth my while."

The man lying above on the ledge under the shadow of the prickly scrub laughed softly, for by the fellow's last remark he recognized him as a man rejoicing in the sobriquet of Mealy Money, and who was rather badly wanted by the police of that region, and on more than one count.

But it would have been better if he had kept his mirth to himself, for the silent shaking of his body detached a large piece of earth, which went bounding down the precipitous ledge and rolled right on to the smouldering embers of the fire.

The two men started up in great consternation, the owner of the rifle seizing it and discharging two or three shots at random in the direction from which the earth had rolled down.

Fired haphazard though they were, one bullet well-nigh found its billet; for, as he was crawling hurriedly away to escape the consequences of his indiscretion, Grip had the heel of his boot shot clean off. He would have been in a sorry plight indeed had it been his foot instead of merely his boot.

As it was, he dived abruptly into the scrub, and, at

the expense of a good many scratches, emerged presently on the farther side. He took to his heels, then, not so much from a regard to his own safety as to get back to camp as quickly as possible, so that if his horse was rested he might ride on to the railway and ascertain for himself if Billy Blore's name had been used in sending a message to Robinson's.

It was well on in the small hours before he and his companion rode into Coutts on horses that were so lame that they could not travel quicker than a walk.

Knocking up the man in charge of the depot, Grip found that the message had been sent just as the fellow had said, and that the horses themselves had passed through, late in the evening, in charge of two men, who, if they were not mounted police, were so good an imitation as to deceive any ordinary observer in the uncertain light of night.

Grip Alderson realized then that he had been very neatly hoaxed indeed. Billy Blore was his district superior, and, until he could be found and communicated with, the telegram supposed to be sent by him must remain good, and search for Ling and the stolen horses was entirely useless meanwhile.

It was in consequence of this that Grip Alderson returned to Lethbridge by the first train passing northward through Coutts, leaving his subordinate to bring the horses on by slow stages.

Despite the toil of his fruitless search, and the long hours in which he had not slept, there was not much sign of fatigue apparent about him as he rode out towards Tentover later in that same day.

In point of fact a journey in the direction of Tentover was always regarded by him as something of a holiday jaunt, to be secretly looked forward to, and

dwelt upon when it was past with a pleasure so keen as to be almost a pain.

He had led a very lonely life for years past, this strong, silent man, with his indomitable pluck and perseverance; but of late existence had taken on a new joy for him, and his admiration for Caryl Mason had grown almost unconsciously, until it had reached the dimensions of an absorbing affection. He did not own this even to himself yet, or probably the hopelessness of his love would have made him very miserable indeed, for he knew enough of Mrs. Mason to be sure that she would never sanction the marriage of her daughter with a mere unknown man like himself, and one, moreover, who followed such a dangerous calling.

It was enough for the present that he had found someone to love, and so he admired Caryl from a distance, always calling her in his own mind by the name the common country folk had given her: "My Lady of Tentover"; and if he laid an undue stress on the pronoun, there was no one to hear it but himself.

A girl was riding on a mowing-machine in one of the big fenced paddocks at Tentover, and he turned his horse's head in the direction of the mower, under the impression that this was Miss Mason herself. But a second glance showed him that this girl was shorter, with dark hair and a square energetic figure, which yet entirely lacked the graceful outlines of Caryl.

"I suppose it must be Miss Helen Rowlands," he said to himself, half-slackening his horse. "I think I will go and introduce myself. I might as well find out if she is really kin to me before I go any farther."

He noticed as he rode up that the girl riding on the mower was managing her horses with consummate skill, getting the utmost work out of the two mettlesome animals, talking to them in a coaxing, caressing fashion as she drove, until they stepped along with a gay and festive air as if it were play and not work to which they were setting themselves so strenuously.

"Good-morning!" said Grip, lifting his cap with a courteous air as he reined up his horse close to the mower.

"Good-morning!" returned the girl, darting a look of quick suspicion at his uniform and losing a little of her bright colour. Then, seeing that he remained stationary, she drew up her horses with a jerk, enquiring in a brisk, rather hard tone: "Do you wish to speak to me?"

"I want to know if I shall find Miss Mason at the house if I ride on to Tentover?" he said, noting the quick, half-furtive gaze she gave him, and wondering at it.

The girl hesitated half a minute, then answered frankly: "I really cannot tell you. I know there were quite half a dozen places she had to go to this morning, but whether she is home again yet I cannot say. You had better go up to the house and enquire. Anything more?" she asked, pausing with her whip poised ready to move the horses on again, when the clatter of the machine would effectually bar all conversation.

"Yes," he answered with a smile, which should have effectually disarmed her distrust. "I think you are Miss Helen Rowlands, and your mother, before she married, was, I believe, Miss Fanny Harper, a

niece of that eccentric old Giles Harper of Canterbury. Am I right?"

To his surprise every vestige of colour faded out of the girl's cheeks. She swayed as if about to fall from the machine, and only recovered her self-control by a manifest effort.

"And if I am, what is that to you?" she asked with an upward fling of her head, whilst her nostrils dilated as if from fear, and her breath came in short panting gasps.

"A good deal, perhaps," he replied with a nervous laugh, for her defiant attitude puzzled him, and he began to wish that he had not come out of his way to speak to her; "for my mother, before her marriage, was named Kate Harper—the elder sister of Fanny."

"Then you are my cousin?" she asked, a quick-leaping look of distress showing plainly that the discovery was anything but pleasing to her.

"I suppose so. My mother, you may remember, offended most of her relatives by marrying, because she loved him, a poor consumptive schoolmaster named John Griffith Alderson, who died before I, his only child, was born; and your mother——"

Again the colour ebbed swiftly from Helen's face; but this time she recovered herself quickly, and broke in hastily upon his unfinished sentence.

"My mother is dead, and my grandfather too, so Philip and I are alone in the world. But we have had very many troubles in our short lives, and—and I hate to ask it of you, Mr. Alderson, but would you mind, for the present at least, taking no notice of this relationship between us?"

"Certainly; if you wish it. I have no desire to intrude myself upon anyone," he rejoined curtly, and,

tugging at his horse's bridle, was about to ride away in high dudgeon when she stayed his going with a quick, pleading gesture.

"Oh, please don't take it that way, Mr. Alderson! Believe me, I should be only too thankful to have found a kinsman in this land of strangers. But, as I said, there have been a good many troubles in our lives, and there is even now a shadow resting on us which makes it to the last degree important that no comment should be aroused on our account, or anything known concerning our forbears. I hate to seem mysterious, and it makes me feel very bad to treat you in such a fashion, but I cannot help myself."

"Don't make a trouble of it, I beg," he said, recovering his good-nature at sight of her distress. "But if at any time you want a friend, remember that you have a kinsman within call, and I will try to prove to you then that blood is thicker than water."

"Thank you!" she said with quivering lips, starting her horses suddenly, the whirr and clatter of the machinery clashing in upon and cutting short another remark that he had just commenced with regard to her probable need of a friend in the future.

He sat still, steadfastly regarding the figure riding upon the mower until it had dwindled to a very small speck in the distance, then he turned his horse's head in the direction of Tentover, saying to himself as he went: "Now I wonder what there is behind to make that girl so frightened of me; first because of my uniform, and then through fear lest I should claim acquaintance and so expose the history of her past. Ah, I have it! Her father was a bad lot, now I come to think of it. Yes, he was a very bad lot indeed, poor girl!"

CHAPTER XVI

HEARD AT THE DOOR

HELEN had awakened that morning with a grim resolve to do her duty, and report now, what ought to have been told a week ago, concerning the attempt on the flume.

She might have still longer evaded this disagreeable task, but for the fear lest more serious damage had ensued from Long Jim's use of the saw than she had at the first believed.

Not being athletic like Caryl, she had not ventured on climbing up the trestle-work in order to inspect the damage for herself, but had lived ever since in a state of very active fear lest something should happen to the waterway as the direct outcome of her neglect.

The mental unrest had tried her severely. She could not tell her trouble to Philip; she could not even let him know that there was a trouble; for all the time she was remembering a day far back in her brother's boyhood when he had come bursting in from school, flushed and indignant, saying that the boys, his school-fellows, had been teasing him about his father.

"And what I want to know is, where is my father, and why doesn't he live here at home with us?" the boy had panted, looking from his pale-faced mother to the bowed, white-haired grandfather, who was all the father he had ever known.

"You have no father but God," the old man said

sternly, his face and mien so forbidding that the boy crept from the room abashed and scared at the unusual severity of one who was always so kind, not even staying to see that his mother had quietly fainted in her chair from sheer misery, or that his sister's face was as white as her pinafore.

But he never again asked a question concerning his father, not even when the death of mother and grandfather left brother and sister alone in the world, thus deepening the confidence between them. Perhaps he guessed something of the misery and disgrace that lay behind, and so would not seek to probe the depths; whilst Helen, on her part, was tongue-tied by reason of her promise to the dead.

"Don't tell Philip about his father unless he asks. Poor lad, it is such a heritage of sorrow to start in life knowing that he has a cloud like that attached to his name!" Mrs. Rowlands had said to her daughter when she knew herself to be dying; and Helen had cheerfully undertaken to shield her brother from knowledge of his father's evil ways so long as she could.

Then her grandfather's time had come to die, and he, too, had begged that the boy might be spared from knowing that his father was still alive, a wanderer and an outcast.

"Let Philip think his father is dead. Ah, would to God he had died rather than come to this! But it was my fault, Nellie, for I spoiled him when he was a boy, and laughed at his wrong-doing when I had better have thrashed him for the good of his soul. Oh, my son! my son!" the old man had cried in his exceeding bitterness of heart, whilst the slow, sad tears of old age rolled down his withered cheeks.

Helen had been remembering all these things in the days since Philip's arrival at Tentover. It would have been a time of almost idyllic happiness for her but for the discovery of her father's whereabouts, and that he was the notorious Long Jim.

The knowledge had killed happiness for her, and had, in addition, brought a new keen pain. Previously her father had been to her a name to be shunned, feared, even regarded with loathing; but since that moonlight night one week ago, when she had put her arms round his neck and kissed him, his personality had entirely changed to her, and she yearned over him with a tenderness that was more maternal than filial in its character.

If only she could see him again, just to tell him that she loved him, and would stand by him through everything if only he would leave off his evil ways and let her care for him.

How she prayed for him in the quiet nights, when Philip was asleep and she was safely shut in the little room at the end of the house! And how she thought of him in the long bright noontides, when she worked in the fields or rode hither and thither transacting the business of the ranch!

But she thought of her duty too, the duty which every day became harder to do, simply because she had not done it at first. There was the risk of much unpleasant comment now by reason of the delay, and it was not in her nature to save herself from unpleasantness by taking refuge in untruth.

At last she screwed her courage to the pitch of resolve, setting out, when breakfast was over, to ride up to Tentover and get the confession over before she began her day's work. They always breakfasted very

early, Philip getting the meal ready whilst she dressed in a leisurely fashion. Then she went off about the day's business, and he, after putting the little house straight and trim, went up to Tentover to oversee Betty's studies, and put her through her paces in higher mathematics.

But he was not due for another two hours after Helen had started work, and she knew there would be ample time for her to get her bad quarter of an hour over long before her brother arrived on the scene.

There was no one but Beulah in the kitchen when she entered the house by the back door and asked for Caryl.

"She is in the master's room, Miss Helen. But land's sake, dear child, how bad you do look! Has anything scared you this morning?" Beulah enquired in affectionate concern, having taken a great liking to the English girl.

"No. I am quite well, thank you! But do you know how long Miss Mason will be; I want to speak to her?"

"Go in, dear child, go in. The master is a deal better this morning, and they were saying they wanted to see you directly you came up," Beulah said, with a wag of her head in the direction of Mr. Mason's room.

Setting her lips firmly, and clenching her hands, Helen passed through the kitchen into the hall, and from thence along the corridor to the sick-room.

Through the open door of the front veranda she saw the nurse and Betty in the garden, and guessed that Mrs. Mason would not have left her chamber yet, for it was still early.

The door of Mr. Mason's room stood slightly ajar,

and, as she stretched out her hand to knock, Helen caught the sound of a name which made her draw back her hand with a sudden, sharp gesture, as if it had been stung.

"Then whom did the other niece, Fanny Harper, marry?"

It was Caryl's voice that asked the question, and Helen held her breath, waiting for the reply.

"A handsome scoundrel, who, I should think, would break her heart in course of time. I forget what his name was, and I entirely lost sight of her after her marriage, though I knew her well enough as a girl. I remember warning old Giles that he would be wise to tie the money up to her and her children, so that her scamp of a husband could not get the fingering of it; but he only laughed, saying that perhaps the fellow would be dead or reformed before any chance of handling the money came to him."

A violent shiver shook Helen, and, turning softly, she went back along the corridor to the kitchen, groping with her hands like a person walking in the dark.

Beulah was in the dairy, making butter, and Helen dropped into a chair by the kitchen table, too faint and sick for the moment to have any power of movement left.

Everything was so plain to her now which had been mysterious and impossible of understanding before. Caryl had told her of Long Jim's animosity to Mr. Mason, quoting Paul Sutton's declaration that it was something to do with a will, but saying she believed Sutton had made a mistake, and that it was merely a cowboy grievance at having range land irrigated for agricultural purposes. Then that night,

when she had encountered her father at the flume, he had spoken of a grudge he had against "old Mason of Tentover", and his desire for revenge. What more likely than that it should be in some way connected with the missing will of her eccentric great-uncle!

But she was exceedingly astonished at the discovery that Mr. Mason had known the old man, and had been on sufficiently friendly terms with him to advise him concerning the making of his will.

Philip had told her that he had heard from the lawyers of a will being in existence, and, pending its finding, no one would receive any benefit from the old man's money; but she had little expected to stumble upon any reference to it in this house, and the fragments of talk she had heard at the door had literally and figuratively taken her breath away.

One thing, however, was quite plain to her, and that was, she must venture on no admissions or explanations concerning her past. Nor must she do as she had intended, confess her relationship to Long Jim, and assure them that she had his promise of non-molestation in the future.

"A handsome scoundrel!" Mr. Mason had called her father, and perhaps he had been that; but he was her father all the same, and she would shield his name as long as she could, just because she was his child, and she loved him.

"Why, Helen, what is the matter? Are you ill?" It was Caryl's voice that broke in upon Helen's confused meditations, Caryl herself coming softly into the kitchen, making no sound as she approached.

Helen started up guiltily, and put her hand up to her forehead in a dazed, confused fashion. "I do feel a little queer, but I shall be better soon. You

wanted to see me, I think, before I started on with the mower?"

"Yes, I did; but with such a white face I am afraid all question of mowing must be put aside to-day so far as you are concerned," Caryl said kindly. "Do you think that you could ride round and do the half-dozen errands I had planned for myself, and so leave me free for the mowing?"


"No, thank you! I shall be all right when I am out-of-doors again, and mowing requires nothing from one saving to drive a straight course; but your errands would need more management and diplomacy than I am capable of this morning, perhaps. What did you want to see me about?"

"Eremus Kaye is coming to-day, so we want you and Philip to stay for supper to-night. I had to speak about it early this morning, because I may not see you again before the afternoon."

"You are very kind, but I don't really like to accept," Helen said with a doubtful air. "For we have stayed supper three times within a week already, and at this rate you may as well board the pair of us."

"Oh, nonsense!" laughed Caryl. "If that is all the objection you have to make, of course you will come. But I do hope the mowing will not make you ill. If it does, leave off, and let it wait until another day."

"It will not hurt me, and if the sun is hot I can put a wet cloth inside my hat; I will carry a water-bottle on purpose," Helen said as she turned to leave the kitchen. Then, a thought coming into her head, she stayed to add as she went out: "Beulah says Mr. Mason is feeling better again this morning. I am so very glad!"



"Yes, he really seems very much improved, both in health and spirits. It is such a comfort to us all. I feel that if only my father were to get well and strong again there is nothing I should have left to wish for," Caryl answered with kindling eyes.

Helen nodded sympathetically. In her heart she was saying the same thing, only it was a moral sickness under which her father languished, and that, as everyone knows, is a much more serious matter than any mere bodily ill.

"I have always clung to my father so much," Caryl went on, following Helen out of the door. "He used to seem to me the embodiment of all that was grand and strong and noble, whilst he was at the same time so patient and tender with me. I can't tell you how bad I felt at first, when he became weak and helpless. All my ideas and theories about fatherly affection seemed to need readjustment. It was in a sense like having a new father; and although I loved the new one none the less dearly, I missed the old one with a strange sense of want and longing impossible to describe."

"I know," murmured Helen, with another nod of sympathy, while a sharp pang shot through her heart, because her father had never stood to her as the embodiment of all that was good and noble in God's creation.

"How selfish of me to be talking like this to you, who have no father!" cried Caryl with a sudden compunction; and then she slipped her arm round Helen's waist as the two went out towards the horse-paddock together, asking kindly: "Have you been an orphan very long, dear? I mean, did your father die long before your mother?"

A sick sensation shot through Helen's heart, something caught her breath, and for the moment seemed almost to choke her; then she stammered confusedly: "We—we never speak of it, it was—was too painful. Indeed Philip does not know. But I—I never think of him as dead, and I shall always love him!"

"Oh, please forgive me!" exclaimed Caryl, shocked at the blunder into which her sympathy for Helen's supposed orphanhood had led her.

Touched by the sight of her distress, Helen essayed to comfort her, though she was feeling giddy and weak from the mental strain of the last half-hour. "There is no need to look so shocked and worried, dear. In most lives there are some raw spots which cannot be touched without making the tender flesh creep, but the outsider does not know, and so cannot be held responsible for the pain that is caused thereby. But now I must catch my horses. Do you mind standing back a little, or I am afraid they will not come?"

Caryl fell back immediately as requested, watching Helen in silence. There was a feeling in her heart almost of resentment, because the other girl had not confided to her the story of that sad past which was too painful to be dwelt upon, or even for Philip to know. It never once occurred to her that there might be disgrace in it, for somehow it was impossible to connect Helen and Philip even remotely with a past which was shadowed and tinged with shame.

Helen's way with horses was the envy and admiration of everyone at Tentover. She never drove her horses into a pen for catching unless they were too far away for her voice to reach them; and now, as she stood in the paddock, eight or nine horses came hurriedly trotting up in obedience to her call, sur-

rounding her in a crowd of tossing manes and waving tails.

"Shall I catch Kitty or Whiteface for you?" she called to Caryl, who stood back by the gate wishing that she had no more trouble than this when she set out to catch a horse.

"I will have Kitty; and which are you going to choose?" she replied, stepping forward to take her own horse by the forelock, leading it up to the back porch, where, saddled and bridled, it could wait until she was ready to start.

"I shall have Lemon and Wildfire first, and come for another pair in about three hours. They walk so much faster when they are fresh," Helen answered, leading a pair of spirited, rather vicious-looking horses out of the paddock by their forelocks, and carefully shutting the gate after her.

But, despite their looks, the animals were docile enough, and Helen was doing well with her mowing when interruption in the person of Grip Alderson came her way to flurry her into a wild confusion of unrest by his avowal of kinship, driving her to ask him to ignore that same tie of blood which, he said, was thicker than water, and bringing no little compunction to her heart because of the implied insult of her manner.

"Oh, I wonder where it will all end!" she said to herself with a weary sigh when he had gone, and the horses were stepping briskly on again, the clank and clatter of the machinery sounding regular and rhythmic as the glittering knives rose and fell with every turn of the cogs.

"And just to think that yonder stern-faced man is poor Aunt Kate's boy! I shouldn't like to be a criminal

with him on my trail; and yet, by the look of him, I should think he can be very kind too. I am glad he told me to go to him if I wanted a friend, for certainly I would much rather have him for a friend than an enemy. But I wonder what he would say if he knew all; and oh, I do wonder if he would be as willing to acknowledge Philip and myself as cousins if he had to take our father with us—poor Father!"

The thought was so sobering that she had no courage to face it, and sat silent so long that the horses came to a stand, apparently under the impression that she had gone to sleep. Then she roused with a start, called to the animals to move on, and the clank and clatter commenced anew.



A WORD CAUGHT HIS EAR AND PULLED HIM UP SHORT



CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE BY-WAYS

IN a little-frequented store not far from Waterton, in the hilly country beyond the Milk River Ridge, two men were lounging, waiting for another.

The store-keeper himself was leaning over the rough slab of deal which served him as a counter, and talking to the two strangers whom chance had sent him as customers that summer afternoon. He was a lanky, lantern-jawed individual of singularly unprepossessing appearance, and if his aptitude for business was to be judged from the condition in which he kept his store, he might be regarded as an all-round failure, for a more gloomy or depressingly dirty place could scarcely be imagined.

But the strangers appeared perfectly satisfied with their surroundings, lounging with the careless abandon of thoroughly lazy fellows who never had done a day's honest work in their lives.

Presently the smaller and more restless man of the two straightened up and walked to the door, peering out in every direction, then coming back to lounge on the counter with a very dissatisfied look on his face.

"Seems to me that we've hit the time a bit too soon, or else the other man has hit it a bit too late," he remarked with ill-concealed anxiety.

"He'll turn up right enough. Don't you worry, Rat," said the other man with a yawn, then turned

again to the store-keeper, discussing the chances of a company of coal prospectors who were working in the hilly country beyond the store. There was no appearance of anxiety about him; indeed he looked more than half-asleep.

Then a slow, slouching step sounded outside on the dusty road, a shadow darkened the doorway, and a tall man crossed the threshold, sitting down with a weary air on a rice barrel just inside.

The store-keeper nodded affably, but took no further notice of the new-comer at present; it being a principle of his never to hurry a customer, as they were sure to spend more money in the end if they had leisure to look about them.

But the small man answering to the name of Rat scanned the arrival up and down with a keen penetrating stare for about five minutes, at the end of that time claiming him as an acquaintance with quite a demonstration of welcome.

"If it ain't Long Jim from Tentover! I said to myself when I first clapped eyes on you that I'd seen you round somewheres before; but where was another matter, and it took some time to argue out."

"You could have spared yourself the trouble. I ain't to say keep on company," Long Jim replied with an air of boredom and weariness.

But the little man was not to be repressed very easily, and, turning with a nod and a wink to the store-keeper, he said briskly: "Try to oil his wheels a bit; he'll turn with a little less creaking then."

"Ah, will you take a drink, mister? it's a leetle warm to-day," said the store-keeper, producing a dirty black bottle from some hiding-place near at hand.

Long Jim assented more civilly, though in point of

fact it was food he wanted, for he had not broken his fast since the previous day, and had entered the store with the intention of disposing of some article of clothing, in purchase of a meal, when the presence of the two loungers deterred him from commencing on the bargain. But the fiery draught poured out of the store-keeper's black bottle took away for the present all remembrance of his hunger, filling him instead with a wild elation of spirits which made him at once as jovial and talkative as he had been morose and taciturn before.

The mood was still on him, and he was talking and laughing uproariously, when another man entered the store—a gentlemanly well-set-up fellow, with a plausible tongue but the eye of a rogue,—and he too claimed Long Jim as an acquaintance.

"Why, it is Ling MacFarlane!" exclaimed Long Jim in noisy surprise. "I thought you were still riding round on Robinson's horses, playing at hide-and-seek with Grip Alderson."

"Oh, that's an old story now, and Grip has gone back to barracks to sit like a bloated old spider in his web, waiting for flies to come and be caught," laughed Ling, with a nod full of meaning to the two loungers, who had been waiting for him so long.

"He'll get caught himself some day perhaps," said Long Jim, jerking his head forward with a knowing nod. It had not taken much bad whisky to produce a condition of semi-intoxication in him, faint and weak as he was from starvation.

"Yes, he'll get caught himself some day. Of that I am quite certain," Ling replied carelessly, yet with a sharp look at Jim as if to see how far he was to be trusted. "And for my part I'm quite ready and

willing to pay down a hundred dollars to the man who catches him."

"What's to be done with him when he is caught?" demanded Long Jim with a sudden return to sobriety, caused by Ling's statement of the money he was willing to spend on the capture of the district superintendent.

"Oh, that can be settled later! You remember the cooking recipe of the famous Mrs. Glass, about first catching your hare before cooking it; and the same holds good with regard to Grip Alderson. It will be easy enough to settle what's to be done with him when we have got him."

"That is what I have always maintained," said one of the other men. "But I have never seen the man yet who would care about the job of tackling Grip Alderson. I should not care to do it myself, I know."

"But you always were a bit of a coward, Mealy Money," Ling retorted, with a sharp glance at Long Jim, as if he were trying to discover how his bait was taking.

"I've never seen the man yet that I was afraid of; and I am clean broke," Long Jim said slowly.

"Quite stony?" queried Rat with a sympathy that was plainly produced by similar experiences in his own past.

"That's it, pardner," Long Jim replied, with a solemn nod that gave emphasis to his speech.

"Then here is a chance for you to get a little capital together to start in a new line. A man can do a good deal with a hundred dollars," Ling said thoughtfully, and with an expansive movement of his arms, as if he were trying to encompass in his grasp the vast results which might accrue from the sum under consideration.

"What's to do?" enquired Long Jim laconically.

"Oh, we can talk that over presently!" Ling answered cheerfully. "Meanwhile we'll see if Mr. Eggs-and-Bacon can't give us a jolly good feed. The black bottle is all very well, but it has too much of an upward tendency; what we want is ballast for our feet."

"Just my opinion," remarked Mealy Money with a wag of his head, for even his well-seasoned brain was not proof against the effects of the potent spirit in the black bottle.

"Oh, I can feed you all, gentlemen, for a consideration!" said the store-keeper, foreseeing gain to himself in the process.

"Very well; be as quick about it then as you can, and give us the best you've got; there need be no stint," Ling replied, rattling the money in his pocket with a lordly air; then he sauntered out to the sunshine again, followed by Mealy Money and Rat; but Long Jim sat on the rice barrel and slumbered fitfully, whilst he dreamed of his daughter and the kiss she had given him.

The store-keeper and his meek drudge of a wife were flying about, making the best preparations possible on such short notice, opening tins of canned meat, frying eggs and bacon, and cooking griddle-cakes.

So appetizing were the odours from the cooking-stove that Long Jim woke hurriedly, and was walking into the room behind the store, in order to see for himself how the preparations were getting on, when a word caught his ear and pulled him up short.

"Murder, I suppose it will be; but it ain't no business of mine. Grip Alderson must take care of himself; he has always been a little too fond of meddling," said the store-keeper, who was bustling round setting

plates, knives, and forks with considerable clatter on the clothless board, whilst his wife tossed griddle-cakes at the fire.

Long Jim turned sharply and went out of the store, leaning over the fence rail outside, and thinking hard, with his eyes fixed on the ground.

He had done many a questionable deed in his time. There had even been dark thoughts of murder in his heart not so very long ago, when he stalked about the paddocks of Tentover, professedly looking for rats, but in reality watching for a chance of being revenged on the man he believed to be his worst enemy.

But a curious change had come over Long Jim, and since the night when his daughter had kissed him it seemed as if half the evil had been exorcised from his nature, and he was shrinking now with actual fear from being drawn into a scheme which must plunge him lower still in the mire of evil, and so farther away from the girl who called him father.

He was always thinking of her now: of her resolute face and mien, and the soft, caressing touch of her arms about his neck.

If only he could see her again! If only he had lived a decent, respectable life, he might have been a happy, prosperous man now, with this daughter as the light of his home—if only he had!

Lower and lower he crouched over the fence rail, while the hot afternoon sun poured down on his back, making him giddy and sick. He was at the lowest depth of self-abasement now, loathing the degradation which had been entirely of his own making, yet without a single germ of hope which might help him to rise to something better even yet.

Then a hand slapped him on the back, and the voice

of Rat sounded in his ears: "Supper's ready; come on, mate. I'm that sharp set I could pretty nearly eat the table, much more the food that is on it."

"Get out! I'm not coming in," retorted Long Jim in surly wise; but there was a quaver of hungry yielding in his tone which the other was swift to detect and take advantage of.

"Oh, I've heard you talk before, and I know you must have your joke, come what will! But there's no need to let good food spoil by getting cold whilst you are humming and hawing round trying to drag a laugh out of us; and Ling says he'll give you twenty dollars on account to-night, so as you sha'n't have to set to work empty-handed," the sly little man went on, laughing noisily, and dragging Long Jim almost by main force in the direction of the store.

Was there ever temptation so subtle and irresistible? The man was hungry, and here was food; he was penniless, and here was money ready to roll into his pockets; and surely he was not obliged to sully his hands with crime just because the store-keeper had said to his wife that there was murder in the work they had asked him to do.

So he suffered himself to be dragged into the house and placed at the board, whereon food was piled in lavish abundance. Then, as he ate and drank, the image of his daughter receded farther and farther from him, the echoes of her voice grew faint and far away.

His remembrance of what came after was hazy and indistinct—only two things stood out clearly in his mind, and they were: first, that he had twenty dollars in his pocket; and next, that he was pledged to the destruction of Grip Alderson.

CHAPTER XVIII

PLEASANT DAYS

BREAKFAST is ready!" shouted Philip in a cheery tone, and Helen, who had been lingering with quite unusual slowness over her morning toilet, gave a hasty glance round to see if her chamber was as she liked to leave it, then opened the door and stepped into the next room.

"The top of the morning to you, Nell! I say, isn't the weather just ripping?" exclaimed Philip, drawing a long, deep breath of satisfaction, as he wagged his head in the direction of the open door, where the sun was shining broadly, and the sky without a cloud.

"Yes, it is lovely," Helen answered, shaking her head a little over the slang, but not otherwise reproving it. Philip was already looking and feeling so much better that she could forgive him more than an occasional lapse into what she was pleased to style cowboy vernacular.

Then she sat down at the table, and watched Philip dishing cornmeal porridge, and giving a final prod with a cooking-fork at the omelette fizzing on the stove, before he also sat down. It puzzled her not a little to know how he had contrived to pick up so many housewifely ways, and to learn such excellent cookery. He always attributed his skill to his consistent study of a cookery-book; but she was disposed to the belief

that he must have gained a lot of experience by helping his landlady in the days before he left England.

But as she sat at table, waiting for her porridge, her gaze travelling round the room, there came a twitching at the corners of her mouth, and then she burst into a ripple of amused laughter.

"What's the joke?" demanded Philip, placing a smoking hot plate of porridge before her.

"I was thinking of the difference there is between men and women, and how easy it is to tell whether a man or a woman is the ruling power in a house," she replied, with the smile still lingering on her face, as she turned her attention to the waiting breakfast.

"Where does the joke come in?" he asked with a comic air of injury.

"Oh, everywhere!" she said with a comprehensive swing of her hand, which included all four walls of the room. "A woman who has only one apartment in which to transact the main business of living mostly contrives to keep what she considers the genteel side of life uppermost, carefully hiding all evidences of cooking utensils away in odd corners, under sofas and so forth. But a man, in the same circumstances, keeps things just where he can lay hands on them quickest, and with an entire disregard of appearance."

"Quite right, too!" replied Philip with sturdy conviction in his tone. "I want to know where the sense lies in being uncomfortable, and pretending you are something different from what you really are."

"Still, there is a happy medium in most things," Helen replied with another ripple of laughter, "and you need not have hung the gridiron just under that delightful little photograph of Magdalen Tower."

"Why not? It is a picture I have an especial fancy

for, and I was always forgetting where I had put that gridiron until I hit on the happy idea of hanging it under the picture; and it is ornamental too, or supposed to be, for I went to supper with the Sawbridges one night after you left England, and their drawing-room was decked out like a pawn-shop, with cracked willow-patterned plates, gridirons tied up in pink ribbon, tambourines decorated with blue streamers, Toby jugs, and all the old rubbish that had been accumulating in the attics for the last hundred years or so."

"You are really very hard on modern ideas of decorative art," Helen said mirthfully. "But I cannot say that I care for that style of thing myself, and I am very glad there is none of it at Tentover; everything is in such good taste there."

"So I think. And, speaking of Tentover, what an exceedingly good sort that Eremus Kaye is. I don't really wonder, now I know him, that you gushed so about him in your letters to me from Toronto," Philip said, rising to gather up the two porridge-plates and place the omelette on the table.

"I am quite sure that I never did any such thing," Helen replied with considerable vehemence, while a bright red glow suffused her cheeks. "It is not my way to gush about people, especially strangers."

"Talk of an angel——!" exclaimed Philip, as a shadow passed the window; then he sprang towards the open door, saying in eager tones: "Good-morning, Mr. Kaye! Have you come round this way in order to sample my omelette?"

"That all depends upon whether there is any to spare," replied Eremus Kaye, as he shook hands with Helen.

"Oh, there is plenty of it! and if there had not been

I could soon have made another. Take this chair, will you, please, and I will sit on a stool. Our house-keeping is in its infancy at present, and has not developed beyond our immediate necessities. I'm sorry you did not look in sooner, because then you could have had some porridge; but that is all gone now," Philip said with so much eager welcome in his manner, and such boundless satisfaction in his domestic arrangements, that the other two were compelled to laugh at him.

"It is fortunate I was not ten minutes later, or perhaps the omelette would have been gone also," said Eremus Kaye, taking the chair Philip had vacated for him, and looking very much at home.

"Philip is inordinately vain of his skill in cookery and housekeeping generally," Helen explained, with a mirthful light dancing in her eyes. "I have been trying to give him a few hints anent wall-decoration, but he is so blindly conceited that my efforts are cruelly wasted. Look on that shelf over the door, Mr. Kaye, and tell me if you ever saw Latin grammars and tin saucepans standing side by side before."

"Oh, I don't use that as a saucepan at present!" interposed Philip hastily. "As a matter of fact, I have it to keep sugar in; for the ants are so clever at ripping up paper bags that I had to find something that was ant-proof, and the lid of that saucepan fits so tightly that I sometimes can't get it off myself."

"It makes me think of the cabin on a lake yacht," remarked Eremus Kaye, with an approving look round at the home-like interior.

"Helen said that it suggested a second-hand furniture shop yesterday, and this morning we have been having a few words about that gridiron. She objects

to its position, on the ground that it is not ornamental. I approve of it because it is so handy, and I don't have to waste ten minutes or a quarter of an hour in hunting round for it every time it is wanted," Philip said, with a swing of his hand in the direction of the gridiron.

"That, of course, is an important consideration. But what is that picture above it—a bit of Oxford? Ah, how lovely! We have nothing like that here," and, leaving his place at the table, Eremus Kaye stood before the picture with an expression of rapt admiration on his clear-cut thoughtful face.

"Perhaps not; but you have other things of beauty. These boundless stretches of ranging ground, for instance, and — and that thing of elegant form and fashion yonder, called a flume," said Philip with a gurgle of laughter, in which the visitor joined. But Helen rose hastily, saying that it was time she started off to her day's work.

There was a shadow on her face as she spoke, and a sudden pang of remembrance in her heart, for the mention of the flume made her think of her father, and the thought brought nothing but pain with it.

Eremus Kaye rose to go also, declaring he had never enjoyed an omelette so much in his life.

"I have always maintained that I had a genius for something, only the difficulty was to discover what the something was," Philip said with a cheerful wag of his head. "But I feel pretty certain now that I have hit on my vocation, and when I get a bit stronger I shall look out for a post as hotel manager."

"Oh, no, you must not! You will have to remain here and take a farm for me to work, for I find that a woman, unless she is a widow and the head of a

family, is not eligible as a homesteader in Southern Alberta," laughed Helen; then, turning to Mr. Kaye, she said: "I have the wagon down here, and am going to drive up to Tentover. Will you come with me, or would you prefer to walk?"

"I will come with you, thank you!" He am not quite seasoned to walking through this thick mat of grass yet, and so a little goes a long way. Are you satisfied with your venture, Miss Rowlands?" he asked a little abruptly as the horse Helen had harnessed drew them at a smart pace up the long slope from Swallow Creek. "I feel a little responsible in the matter, you know, since I had something to do with your coming."

"I think you had everything to do with it, and I am very, very grateful," she said warmly, "for I feel that it will be new life to Philip. The dear lad has not suffered a pain of any sort since he has been here; he sleeps all night as peacefully as an infant, and if he has any dreams at all they are happy ones."

"But do you like the life yourself?" he persisted, for his sharp eyes had already noticed the shadow which so often dropped over her face when it was in repose, and there were lines of care about her mouth which had not been there when she lived in Toronto."

"Indeed I do," she said earnestly. "The work is well within my scope, and no one could be kinder than Miss Mason. I am learning, too, a great deal about farming that I did not know before."

"That is satisfactory so far as it goes. I only hope it goes far enough," he said with a keen look at her, and so much doubt in his tone that she first flushed hotly, then turned very pale, and was disposed to be rather silent for the remainder of the drive to the house.

They were very pleasant days which followed. Almost every evening Helen and Philip stayed for supper at Tentover, driving home to their little cabin by the flume in the warm summer gloaming, more often than not with Eremus Kaye as a companion; he choosing to drive down the long slope for the pleasure of walking up it again, or perhaps for the sake of the companionship, which every day grew closer between himself and the brother and sister.

Then there were the long busy days of haying and harvest, in which Eremus Kaye took his vacation pleasure by working as hard as, or harder than, any man on the place, thereby earning his board and a great deal more beside, as Caryl used to say.

The shadows showed less often on Helen's face as the busy, happy weeks went by. Her eyes lost their trick of apprehensive watchfulness, and her heart dropped half its burden of anxiety, for she was living entirely in the present, and it was such a blissful time that she chose neither to look forward nor backward, lest the shadows lurking there should obtrude a chill on her present content.

One day, when Eremus Kaye had been domiciled for rather more than a month at Tentover, Helen had to drive a load of farm-produce into the railway depot at Lethbridge. She was to have four horses, as the load was heavy, and, hearing of the expedition, Betty came running out of the house to know if she might not go to the town with Helen.

"Can you leave lessons?" asked Helen as she fixed the driving lines on to the front horses before taking her seat in the wagon.

"I have no lessons this morning, because Philip is going to do some writing for Caryl, and afterwards

read to Father, and Beulah says that she will spare me from housework if I may go with you," replied the child.

"Clamber up, then, dear, for these animals don't want to stand a minute longer than is necessary, and I am in quite as much hurry to get off as they are," said Helen, soothing down the four restive horses by sundry pats and caresses. Then, gathering up the lines, she climbed quickly up to the seat on which Betty had already settled herself, while the horses set off at a frisky canter as if the heavy load behind them had been nothing at all.

"I always love to go driving with you," said the little girl with a sigh of satisfaction, "because you treat the horses so nicely. You never tug at the lines as if you wanted to pull their poor dear heads off. And if they are frisky, you don't abuse them for their high spirits."

"I rather enjoy driving mettlesome horses," Helen answered, the glow on her cheeks deepening as she sat firmly and squarely on the driving-seat, guiding the four animals with as much ease and confidence as if she had only had old Charley to manage.

"In my own mind I always connect you with horses. I suppose that is because they were the means of our first introduction," went on Betty. "And I do hope you and Philip will keep on living at Tentover, even if Caryl does marry and go away, for it would seem so very strange without you here now."

"Is Caryl going to be married?" asked Helen in surprise, for she had seen and heard nothing previously of any such impending change.

Betty laughed mischievously. "Mother says she is, and is always talking of the happy time it will be for

her when she has a daughter living in the city. But Beulah says the right signs are wanting, and she is quite sure that neither Caryl nor Eremus care a cent piece for each other, saving in a friendly, brother-and-sisterly sort of fashion."

"Oh, I did not understand! I mean I did not know there was any attachment between them," Helen said with lips that had suddenly grown dry and parched, as if from inward fever, and a sinking at heart the cause for which she would not own even to herself.

"There is not!" explained Betty with a vigorous flourish of her hands by way of emphasis. "But there ought to be, if things would only fall out according to the wishes of other people; and for a long, long time, ever since Caryl was away at school in Toronto, Mother has hoped that she would marry Eremus Kaye. He comes here every summer for his vacation, you know, but, although he and Caryl are such good friends, they never seem to get any farther, and people have to get a great deal farther than being good friends before they screw their courage up to the point of marrying, don't they?"

"I should think so," Helen replied with a laugh that was distinctly unmirthful. "But I have had no experience to guide me, Betty, and so I can only speak from a general stand-point."

"Father gets in such a worried state when Mother talks about Caryl getting married and going away to the city, for he does hate city life so much; as much, I think, as Mother loves it. But then, you know, she was born and brought up in Toronto, and she moved a great deal in society there, so of course she misses it all so badly?"

"I have always wondered that Mrs. Mason ever

came to live in the country," Helen said; and indeed anyone less fitted for the rough-and-tumble of a country life could hardly be found.

"She never would have but for falling in love with Father," said Betty. "He was a poor man then, and had just taken up this land, and meant to live in a wooden hut until he had earned enough money to build a proper house. But Grandfather would not hear of Mother having to live in such a little place, so he advanced the money for building, and that is why we have such a nice house and garden, and why the irrigation work has been carried out so largely on the ranch. Then, when Father and Mother were married, Grandfather came here to live with them until he died. Here comes Mr. Alderson on that big black horse of his. Won't you pull up and speak to him?" she asked, as a horse and its rider showed faintly through a cloud of dust approaching from the opposite direction."

"No, indeed! If I drew up to speak to every person I met, when do you suppose I should get back from the town?" laughed Helen; and then, in passing, she bestowed a cool little nod upon Grip, in response to his courteous salutation, though her heart smote her because of the tacit deceit of that unacknowledged bond of kinship between them.

Betty chattered on as before, but now Helen was only half-heeding her; there were so many things to think about, and she scarcely spoke again until the town was reached.

Then Betty got down. She had some shopping to do for her mother, to call at the doctor's house with a message from her father, and a commission to execute for Caryl; so, telling Helen she would be round at the

depot in about half an hour, she went her way with a smile and a nod, while Helen tooled her team carefully through the streets to the depot.

Lethbridge being a mining town, there was a good deal of business going on in the freight yards, and Helen's horses resenting the noise and commotion of shunting operations, she was forced to get down from her seat and try the effect of personal persuasion in quieting them down whilst waiting her turn for unloading.

Her load consisted of sacks of early potatoes, consigned to an agent at Calgary, and as the sacks would be lifted from her wagon into the freight car by a crane, she had to draw into position near to the line.

The horses were quiet enough all the while she stood where they could see her, and she was caressing the nose of one of the front pair, whilst its companion was endeavouring to get a share of notice by gently nudging her arm, when a train of passenger cars going east steamed slowly away from the platform.

It came so near to where Helen was standing with her four horses that she could distinctly see the faces of a group of men on the rear platform of the end car, and she gave a start of surprise at recognizing her father in the tall dark man leaning on the rail.

Forgetful that the cars were moving, realizing nothing saving the fact that her father was there, and that she wanted to tell him of all that strong, new love which had sprung up in her heart for him, she started forward, stretching out her hands with an imploring cry of "Father, Father!"

The man leaning on the rail straightened himself up, making an eager plunge forward as if to come to her; but the cars were gathering speed, and to

spring off was impossible, so he could only wave his hand in token that he had seen and heard her, when the train passed out of sight behind a row of empty freight wagons.

Helen was quivering from head to foot when she went back to her horses, but now there was a thrill of hope and expectation in her heart such as she had never known before.

Her father would know by her gesture that she wanted him, and he would come back to her. Then she would be able to tell him how she loved him, and her love and help would be strong enough to lift him from the evil of his past and set him with his face towards a new future of upright life and conduct.

There was some good in him, of that she was quite sure, and there was no doubt in her heart about her ability to bring it out and develop it. She was thinking and planning it all out in her mind when there came to her, with sudden and overwhelming force, the remembrance of the blissful present in which she had been living during these last few weeks.

All that joyful, pleasant companionship would have to be given up if she decided to openly acknowledge her father and take her place at his side, for Eremus Kaye, with his ultra-fastidious way of looking at things, would certainly not care to be on intimate terms with Long Jim's daughter.

A strangled sob clutched at her throat as she stood absent-mindedly rubbing at the soft noses of her charges.

In her heart she knew that Eremus Kaye cared for her, and that despite the chatter of Betty concerning the possibility of his mating with Caryl. But she did not for one moment believe that his liking would be

strong enough to survive the knowledge that Long Jim was her father.

"But to help Father to a better life will be worth the sacrifice of everything else, and Jesus Christ gave up more than that to save a sinful world!" she murmured with a rapt exaltation on her face.

Yet she knew all the time that, hard as it was to relinquish happiness in prospective, it would be still harder to give it up in reality; and, fearing lest her strength might prove unequal to the task, she prayed fervently that she might not be tempted, and that Eremus Kaye might never ask her to be his wife, since it was manifestly impossible that he could ever wed with Long Jim's daughter.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SHAFT THAT TOLD

GRIP ALDERSON was on his way to Tentover that morning when he passed Helen and Betty in the wagon.

It was quite astonishing, even to himself, how many errands he found to take him in the direction of the Masons' ranch; and although he never stayed long, or said a word apart from business matters or kindly enquiries after the poor invalid, those matter-of-fact visits were the rosy spots in his dangerous and hard-working life.

However, on this particular morning Caryl was away on the ranges, and Beulah told him she was not expected back until nearly sundown.

The disappointment in his heart was so keen that it found its reflection on his face, and Beulah, imagining that his business must be of very serious import, hastened to inform him that Mrs. Mason was about and could see him, adding: "And they've carried the master out on to the veranda this morning; perhaps you could step round that way and have a talk to him. I expect he'd be just dreadful pleased to see you, for he's picking up quite amazing now, and everything seems to interest him."

"I will go round, then," Grip Alderson replied; and, turning from the back porch, he opened the little gate in the garden fence, making his way between the

trellis-work alleys of ripening tomatoes to the steps leading up to the veranda.

Mrs. Mason was sitting with her husband, who lay stretched out on a long cane chair, and she rose to give the district superintendent a cordial welcome when he appeared.

The invalid also stretched out a weak hand in welcome. "Glad to see you, Alderson; any news about?"

"Not much to interest you, I think, sir, except that we are to have a bumper wheat-crop, and that, I dare say, you know already."

"Yes, it will be a fine season, taken all round. We have lifted our early potatoes, and sent them off to-day; such a crop, too! and of course we've beaten the northern markets by some weeks. It was Caryl's idea to grow early potatoes, and get them off the ground by the beginning of August. I tell you, that little girl of mine has got her head screwed on the right way, and there is the making of a really fine farmer in her, only the pity of it is that she was not a boy."

Grip Alderson shook his head with an involuntary air of dissent. "There is no necessity for wishing Miss Mason had been a boy, so far as I can see, for no man, saving, of course, yourself, could have managed Tent-over as she has done this summer."

The invalid's face glowed with warm pleasure at this praise of his daughter, but Mrs. Mason's fine eyes shot a glance of swift suspicion at the visitor, whose feelings had betrayed him into an indiscreet warmth of speech.

"Caryl is a good girl, and takes to farming because it is the duty of the moment, but I have no doubt she will be very glad to exchange it for a more congenial life in the city when her father is better," she remarked, lifting her head and letting her gaze stray out to the

sunny garden beyond, where Eremus Kaye could be seen putting in a morning's energetic work among the flower-beds.

Perhaps she honestly believed that the match she so desired for her daughter was in a fair way of coming to pass, or it might have been that she only spoke as she wished. But Grip Alderson, with the swift unreasoning jealousy of a man in love, instantly gathered the meaning of her glance, leaping to the conclusion that Eremus Kaye and Caryl were already betrothed, and only awaiting the recovery of Mr. Mason before being married.

But neither by look nor gesture did he betray his pain, and the lady, who was covertly watching him, could not tell whether or no her shaft had struck home.

For a while longer he sat chatting with the invalid master of the house, then rose to take his leave, the life of a district inspector being far too busy to allow of long interludes of leisure between dawn and dark.

"Have you caught that rascally horse-thief, Ling MacFarlane, yet?" enquired Mr. Mason, who was always loth to let any visitor depart who would talk to him of the outdoor world.

"No, but I shall do so before I've done," replied the other with a sudden squaring of his resolute jaw, and the light of battle in his eye.

"I hope you won't be long about it either. We have a good many horses on Tentover that I should not like to lose, and it is not as it was when I could be in the saddle half the night when need arose," the sick man said with an unavailing sigh of impatience at his own helplessness.

"There are a gang of them, I fancy, and, from what I can learn, that ne'er-do-well Long Jim has joined

them, and I am waiting the more patiently now in the hope that when we next strike we may secure the lot," Grip answered.

"That would be a good thing indeed. I can tell you I have a good many anxious hours in the nights when sleep is out of the question. A ranchman's wealth is so entirely at the mercy of outsiders," Mr. Mason went on.

"In a measure, yes; but somehow the ranchman gets taken care of. See how you worried about that flume of yours, and yet it has stood all right, and done its work magnificently," replied Grip in a soothing tone.

"Ah! that it has; and Tentover owes half its prosperity to that ninety feet of overhead waterway; but my great mistake was in not building more substantially. Another thousand dollars or so at the first and I need not have worried about the flume at all, which means that I should not have gone 'out riding on that unsafe saddle, and all this misery of pain and helplessness would have been spared me."

"We can't always argue back to first causes. It does not look right now, but one can never tell what the final result may be; there is often more good in seeming evil than we think," the young man said, bending over the sick man with kindly compassion softening the stern outlines of his face. Then he bowed to Mrs. Mason and took his leave.

He carried a sore heart with him, for, despite the cheery optimism of his words to the sick man, he could see no good in the seeming evil of which he had been warned by the careless glance of Mrs. Mason's eyes, which had in his judgment linked Caryl's name with that of the Toronto stranger, who doubtless possessed wealth, position, culture, and all the other good things which he, Grip Alderson, lacked.

Eremus Kaye looked up from his work as the superintendent passed, throwing him a cheery "good-morning!" but he only got a brusque acknowledgment of his salutation, and was mildly surprised at the lack of cordiality in a man who was usually so genial and courteous.

"That district superintendent of yours looks as if he had got out of bed the wrong side this morning," Mr. Kaye remarked presently, when Philip, who had met Grip Alderson in the trellised pathway, came slowly across the sunny garden with a bundle of papers in his hand.

"More likely he was not in bed at all, which may well account for any surface surliness. They say about here that he does not sleep in a bed more than two days in a week, sometimes not that; I don't fancy, therefore, that the lot of a district inspector is all honey," Philip replied, commencing to turn over his papers in order to find one about which he required some advice.

"It must need a strong man to stand the wear and tear," said Eremus, raking deftly between two closely-planted clumps of blossoming flowers, and taking no small pride in the effect of his voluntary labours.

"He is a strong man, I should say, judging from his appearance. Do you know, I can always see such a strong likeness in him to my sister, and it is not only in face, but in gesture and movement also," went on Philip, turning his bundle over again, because he could not find the paper he specially wanted.

"I have not noticed it," the other replied.

"Because you have not looked for it. Naturally you are not interested in the tricks and turns of her face as I am, and, in consequence, would not notice

their reduplication in another person," Philip answered serenely.

Eremus Kaye struck his rake with quite vicious energy among a great cluster of Indian pinks, uprooting half of them and sadly mutilating the remainder.

"They are flowers," interposed Philip hastily, to stay further destruction. Then, seeing the almost ludicrous annoyance on the amateur gardener's face, he added, with intent to cheer him: "But I don't wonder you made the mistake, for I took them for weeds the other day, and suggested the wisdom of grubbing them up; and you should just have heard the lecture Helen gave me on my ignorance."

"I hope you profited by it," remarked Eremus dryly.

"I did. For I there and then formed a resolution, which at all costs I mean to adhere to, never to do any work in a flower-garden. Weeds in a field I feel that I could get to know in time from wheat or oats; I might even manage not to do much mischief among plain vegetables, but beyond that my intelligence will not go, and it is of no use to attempt the impossible."

"So I think; but these weeds have got to go, and if a few flowers go too, why, so much the worse for the flowers," Eremus answered, grubbing away with that actively moving rake of his, but taking good care to give the Indian pinks a very wide berth indeed.

Philip found the paper he wanted, and, producing it, asked for advice as to the right way of going to work, and Eremus Kaye suspended raking temporarily in order to see what was needed.

"You are very accurate in your work. We should be glad to have you in our Toronto office," he said, handing back the paper when he had inspected it and explained what was mysterious in it.

Philip's eyes gathered a wistful look. "There is no chance of a life like that for me now. I know my limitations, and I am trying to be content to do what I can. It isn't hard work coaching Betty, and every little helps. Meanwhile it is like paradise to feel no pain, and to be able to sleep when night comes."

Eremus nodded sympathetically, but he was raking in critical nearness to a bed of deep-purple pansies, and he knew that it behoved him to be careful.

"If I were like other people, and able to rough it, I would enlist in the mounted-police corps to-morrow, even though I knew that I might be shot next week," Philip went on with a light of enthusiasm kindling in his eyes.

"The mounted police don't all get shot," remarked Eremus, who had changed his rake for a Dutch hoe, and was prodding in a bed of zinnias.

"Some of them run a good risk of it, though. Alderson does at any rate, if what Paul Sutton says is true. He has heard that the next move of the notorious Ling will be to get the superintendent out of the way by fair means or foul, most probably foul, for he has rendered himself a veritable terror to evil-doers by his unceasing watchfulness of every district under his care."

"It is much to be hoped that Alderson will get first innings then, and succeed in running Ling in before he can do any mischief," Eremus replied; "for it is always a pity when a good man meets disaster because of the zeal and thoroughness with which he has done his duty."

"So I think," said Philip, and, bunching his papers together in his hands, he went back into the house once more.

CHAPTER XX

A DARK HOUR FOR HELEN

ALL the busy life of Tentover seemed to culminate in a grand finale of effort by the middle of August, when the wheat was cut.

Everyone, indoors and out, shared in the extra toil, saving the invalid, who spent his days on the veranda gazing out wistfully over the fields he loved so well. But there was hope in his heart now, for he knew himself to be on the way to recovery, and that his convalescence was merely a question of time and patience.

There had never been such a harvest on Tentover before, and Caryl's heart swelled with satisfaction as she rode to and fro, intent on her heavy task of management. She was out and about from dawn to dark in these busy harvest days; and if her mother sighed over the delicate skin, too ardently kissed by the western sun, Caryl herself paid little heed to the damage wrought to her complexion. It was happiness enough to her to know that the thing she had set her hand to was a certain and unqualified success.

There was one drawback to her perfect content, however, and that lay in the fact that Grip Alderson rarely rode over to the ranch now, and if she met him in the town there was a stern aloofness in his manner which depressed her more than she cared to admit even to herself. There were times in plenty

when she would have welcomed back some of her old anxieties if their return could have brought her again the protecting kindness which he had lavished on her then.

Then a rumour reached her of the unpopularity of the district superintendent with a certain class of the community, and a chill premonition of evil to come to him blanched her face, almost making her heart stand still with fear.

It was a rumour too vague for there to be any possibility of tracing it to its source, but the remembrance of it was filling Caryl's mind with uneasy dread when, one day at the close of harvest, she met Grip Alderson as she was riding out from the town.

He lifted his cap in greeting, but would have let his big black horse trot past unchecked if she had not pulled her own animal up so suddenly that it reared in resentful amazement at being treated so badly.

"Good-morning, Mr. Alderson!" she said, some confusion visible in her manner, which he attributed to the restive behaviour of her horse, the creature seeming undecided as to which end of its anatomy it preferred to have highest in the air, as it pranced first on its hind-feet, then, coming suddenly down on its fore-legs, executed sundry flourishes with its heels, to the discomfiture of passers-by, though Caryl kept her seat in spite of its gymnastic display, and succeeded at length in quieting it down.

"Isn't it rather a risk for you to ride a circus-performing animal like that?" Grip asked with a disapproving air. His own horse had stood like a statue during the capering of the other steed; but then it was a well-trained animal, with its nervous system properly under control.

"I am afraid it was all my fault for pulling it up so sharply. Kitty is as nervous as a fine lady, and flies all to pieces if checked too suddenly," Caryl answered with a smile. She was panting and flushed from the tussle, but otherwise none the worse.

"You should let a man ride the creature for a while. Horses with nerves are by no means desirable steeds for ladies. Couldn't your friend, Mr. Kaye, use it for a spell?" he asked, a grim look settling on his face, as if he were setting himself to a task that tried his strength almost beyond endurance.

"Oh, dear, no! Mr. Kaye is not great at riding," replied Caryl with a ripple of amused laughter, as she soothed and patted the excitable horse. "A gentle amble on old Charley is all that it would be safe for him to attempt. I should have asked Lester or Forbes to ride Kitty for a week or two, but they are both hasty and uneven in their treatment of horses, and she is much too valuable to be spoiled in the training."

"Will you let me have the creature for a couple of weeks, Miss Mason? I will warrant its nerves being better under control at the end of that time; and I am sure your father would not like you to ride about on a half-broken creature such as that is now."

"I think it is very kind of you to offer, and I shall be very glad to let you have Kitty for a fortnight, or a month if you think it necessary," Caryl answered with a frank acceptance of the kindness and a dancing joy at her heart because it had been proffered. "I can manage very well without her now that harvest is so nearly over. But it was something else I wanted to speak to you about. Do you know—I mean, have you heard that there are rumours afloat of serious evil intended you?"

"There are always such rumours—at least that has been my experience," he said, with a smile at the wistful earnestness of her expression, "but they never come to anything."

"These may; and oh, Mr. Alderson, do be careful not to go about alone at night, or in dangerous places!" she implored, a vague terror of the unknown seizing her now and causing her to be more disregarding of self-betrayal than was her wont. "And report says that the horse-thief, Ling MacFarlane, has vowed to clear you out of his way."

"I don't know what Ling may have said or done on his part; I only know that, so far as I am concerned, I have resolved to clear him out of my way, and I mean to do it by hook or by crook. The state will not be worth living in soon if men of that sort are allowed to go unchecked," he answered, with the grim look coming back to his face.

"But it is well to be careful," she urged with a shiver.

"I shall do my duty," he replied with a touch of dogged obstinacy, adding, with a thrill of bitterness vibrating his tone: "And I am a lonely man, you know; there will be no one to grieve for me if I fall."

Caryl turned her head quickly to hide the look of utter misery which leaped into her eyes, but she did not say any more on the subject, merely asking, before she rode on: "Shall I send the horse in to the barracks for you, or will you send out for her?"

"I will ride home across Tentover to-night, as I come from Endwater, and bring her home with me," he replied; then, as Caryl nodded a good-bye and rode on, he paused a moment longer to look after her, saying to himself: "Now I wonder why she turned her

head away when I said there would be no one to grieve for me! If I thought——”

But his sentence was not completed even to himself, for at that moment one of his subordinates rode up with a clatter of hoofs and a great cloud of dust, making altogether about as much commotion as if he had to herald the coming of the governor-general.

“Anything wrong, Blake?” demanded Alderson as the young man came within hail.

“No, sir. I had almost said it was good news, only it sounds inhuman to talk like that of a fellow-creature’s disaster. But there’s been a rather bad accident out by Brunton, where they were blasting for coal up in the hills. One man was killed outright, and two more badly injured. That lively rogue, Mealy Money, is one of them, and Long Jim the other.

“Are they likely to get better?” asked the superintendent.

“I think not, sir; and it won’t be any very great loss to the state if they don’t. But the important part is that the dead man has been identified as Ling MacFarlane,” replied Blake with an air of unconcealed triumph.

“Then I should say the identification is a mistake—if the men were at work when it happened, that is; for I could not imagine Ling working under any circumstances,” Alderson said, with a very dubious shake of his head.

“They were not at work, sir, but must have had a camp in the hills just above where the miners were at work. For, when the explosion had taken place, and they went back to see what the blast had done for them, they found the three men lying dead and dying among the debris.”

"Humph! That is a queer story. I wonder if I ought to go off to Brunton at once! But no, I can't leave that Endwater business until to-morrow. I will have a fresh horse and ride out to-night. Or, better still, I could leave Lethbridge by the eight-o'clock cars to-night, and go down to Brunton by rail; that would save a lot of saddle-work. You might wire to Brunton for a horse to be in readiness, or perhaps I had better have two horses, in case I want to take a man with me."

"But you were about all last night," began Blake in a tone of expostulation.

"It can't be helped. If that dead man is Ling I may feel entitled to a week of nights in bed; but if it isn't, my arrears of sleep will have to wait over for a better chance later on."

"If you want a man with you to-night, may I go with you?" asked Blake eagerly,

Grip Alderson shook his head. "I am afraid not. I look to you as the most dependable person to have at home when I am away. But I may not want anyone. I shall see when I come back to-night."

Caryl reached Tentover without any further gymnastic displays from her horse, and went about her duties in a complex frame of mind that was partly very happy and partly acutely depressed.

Fortunately her work was of the lightest that day. The corn was all carted and threshed. Lester and Forbes were away looking after cattle, Sutton was keeping the necessary ranch work gently on the move, whilst Helen was indoors helping Beulah to make marrow jam.

Eremus Kaye, Philip, and Betty had taken the little wagon and gone berry-hunting in a *coulée* five or six

miles away. They had pleaded for Helen to accompany them, but she, with a woman's instinctive foresight, had refused to go. If only she gave the man from Toronto no chance to say what was in his heart, then she herself would be spared the pain of putting happiness beyond her reach, at least so she told herself, being ignorant of the fact that when a man wants a thing he always finds an opportunity of asking for it; and thus the evil day was only postponed after all.

But it was a real rest and pleasure to spend a day at quiet work indoors, after all the bustle and turmoil of harvest labour, and Helen was carrying trays of jam-pots, ready-filled, covered, and labelled, from the kitchen to pack away in the store-room, humming a gay little tune under her breath, when Caryl came up the veranda steps with Grip Alderson to talk to the invalid, who was lying as usual on the long chair, looking out over the pleasant country.

Helen always felt a little shamefaced about meeting Grip Alderson, for she was keenly regretful of her refusal to admit the relationship between them, and so she was disposed to avoid an encounter with him when she could.

He was standing with his back to her as she came and went with her relays of pots. But although he did not see her, every word he uttered was as plainly audible to her as if she had been standing directly in front of him.

He was telling Mr. Mason of the mining accident in the hills beyond Brunton, and describing the way in which the men blasting had blown up more than they had in any way reckoned upon.

"One was quite dead when they picked him up, and the other two badly injured. Mealy Money

may live, but the wire from Brunton said that Long Jim's case was quite hopeless," said Grip Alderson. A terrific smash sounded so close behind him that he gave a startled jump, then immediately turned about to see what it was that was happening in his rear.

Helen had bestowed all her pots safely on the shelf of the store-room save one, and that was lying on the floor at her feet in a score of fragments, which were imbedded in a golden, pulpy mass that had spread itself into a round splotch from whence meandered tiny rivulets of syrupy liquid.

Grip gave one glance at the fragments and another at Helen's face, then came quickly towards her.

"Have you hurt yourself?" he asked in surprise, for there was absolute anguish on her face.

"No, no, it is not that," she said hoarsely, clutching at the edge of the shelf to keep herself from falling.

"How white you are! Do you feel ill, dear?" asked Caryl, who had followed Grip into the house, and now came hastening to Helen's side, as she still clung to the shelf, swaying blindly to and fro.

But for the moment Helen seemed incapable of speaking, standing with an awful look of frozen misery on her face. Then she essayed to speak, but though her lips moved no sound came from them.

"Help me take her into the dining-room, Mr. Alderson; will you, please?" said Caryl, rising to the emergency; and, seizing Helen by one arm, whilst Grip supported her on the other side, they half-led, half-carried her into the dining-room.

"Did you say that he was dying, really dying?" Helen asked, finding her voice at last, and fixing her eyes on the face of the astonished superintendent.

"I said that one man was found dead, and two

others were not expected to recover," he answered in a puzzled fashion; then asked with an abrupt change of tone: "But what difference can it make to you in any case, Miss Rowlands, that two vagabonds like Long Jim and Mealy Money have got their deserts otherwise than at the hands of the hangman?"

"Oh, hush, be merciful!" she implored, lifting her stricken face to look from him to Caryl. "Long Jim is my father, and I love him!"

"Helen, it is not possible; you must be dreaming!" exclaimed Caryl in shocked protest, for she was genuinely horrified to think of any relation between her friend and the ill-conditioned loafer who had so long menaced the peace and prosperity of Tentover.

Helen, however, took no notice of her, but stretched out imploring hands to Grip-Alderson, saying: "Do you remember telling me that blood was thicker than water, and that if I ever wanted a friend I was to tell you so?"

"Yes, yes, I well remember; and I will stand to my word too. What is it you want me to do for you?" he asked soothingly, taking her trembling hands into his strong, firm clasp, with a glad feeling at his heart that at last the time had come when he could again claim kinship with someone, and forgetting that in calling Helen and Philip his cousins he would also have to admit a relationship to that reprobate Long Jim.

"I want you to take me to my father at once—will you?" she cried imploringly; then, not waiting for him to reply, turned swiftly to Caryl, who stood looking on with unqualified amazement on her face.

"Mr. Alderson's mother and my mother were sisters," she began, in hurried explanation; "but I knew nothing

of his being here when I came, nor did I even recognize his name. And when he met me one day, and spoke of the relationship, I begged him to keep it a secret, but I dared not tell him why."

At this moment Mrs. Mason was heard calling Caryl, and with a quick grasp of the situation, Grip Alderson stepped out of the room to obey the summons himself, leaving the two girls alone together.

"My poor dear, tell me all about it!" cried Caryl, sitting down on the couch beside Helen, and drawing the stricken white face to a resting-place on her shoulder.

"I had already found out that Long Jim and my father were one and the same," panted Helen, dry-eyed and resolute still, and with only the labouring breath to bear witness to her inward emotion; "but that was not my main reason for desiring to have nothing said of the relationship. I had accidentally overheard you and Mr. Mason talking only that morning of my great-uncle, Giles Harper of Canterbury, and I thought if you knew so much you would know all; and—and I was ashamed then that you should know me as the daughter of Long Jim, the man who had tried to do you so much harm."

"Poor darling, how you must have suffered!" murmured Caryl in a caressing tone, though her mind was in such a whirl of confusion that she hardly knew what she was saying or doing. "But, Helen, I can't understand things at all. It is quite too bewildering to think of you being mixed up in that puzzling business of Giles Harper's missing will."

"I can't understand things either. I cannot even stop to try straightening them out in my own mind,

for I must go to my poor father and do what I can for him. Oh, why did I not go to him before? If I had, perhaps my love might have won him from his evil ways, and this might never have happened." A great sob came up in her throat and stopped her utterance then, and for a few moments she sat silently battling with her misery, whilst Caryl as silently looked on and sympathized with a sorrow too deep for words to console or alleviate.

Then Grip Alderson came back to the room where the two girls were sitting.

"Do you really want to go to Brunton with me to-night to see your—your father?" he asked, coming to a stumbling halt, because it seemed so preposterous to think of Long Jim as the father of anyone.

"Yes, yes, I must go!" she said in a pain-wrung tone, rising hastily. Then, overcome with a sudden recollection, she caught her breath in another hard tearless sob: "There is Philip. Oh, what shall I do about telling him? He does not even know that his father is alive. He has never been told anything; and now to be plunged into all this. How will he bear it?"

"There is no need to tell him anything—at present," replied Caryl with the brisk decision which always came to her in crises like these. "I will say to him that you have gone under Mr. Alderson's care to look after a poor sick man, who has no one to nurse him, and that you will not be back for a day or two."

"Quite explanation enough under the circumstances," broke in Grip Alderson. "And now we must be off as quickly as we can, for I want to catch the eight-o'clock cars out from Lethbridge to Brunton, where I have wired for two horses to be waiting for me."

"I am ready, or at least I shall be when I have slipped on a riding-habit," she said; then turned to Caryl with a quick apology: "Oh, I beg your pardon! I have not even said, May I go, and there is so much still to be done!"

"Of course you must go, and don't for a minute worry about the work. We shall manage somehow," Caryl answered with ready cheerfulness; then hurried off to pack a bag with her own things for the journey, since there was no time for Helen to go back to the cabin by the flume to make preparations.

Helen put on her habit with a feeling of dazed unreality all about her. This dark hour had dropped upon her with such appalling suddenness that just at the first she was stunned by the shock, and conscious of nothing but pain. If only her father could be spared to her, so that she might have an opportunity to win him by love! If only—— But Grip Alderson had said he was dying, and in death there was no hope.

"I have put in just what I think you will need most, Helen, and whatever else you want you must write to me for," Caryl said, rising to her feet when she had packed a bag with as many things as it could be induced to hold.

"Thank you! I feel almost too dazed to know what I am doing. How I wish I could have seen Philip for a few minutes before I go! And yet it may be better that I cannot, for I could never explain all in such a short time; and he is so sensitive, poor lad, that in any case he will suffer badly, I fear. I would have told him long ago, only Mother and Grandfather both begged that all knowledge of our trouble

might be kept from him as long as possible," Helen said, putting her hand to her head with a weary sigh.

"There will be time to tell him later," Caryl said in a reassuring tone. "If you want any help, Helen, send for it, and either I or Eremus Kaye will come to your assistance directly."

"Not Mr. Kaye. Oh, please, I could not bear that he should come!" burst out Helen impetuously, and with more self-betrayal than she was at all aware of.

"Very well, I will come then, and leave Eremus as my deputy here at home. I can be spared now harvest is over, that is one comfort. Are you ready, dear?" Caryl asked, with such a buoyant light-heartedness of tone that Helen might well have resented it, only she was too keenly depressed and absorbed by her trouble to notice anything else.

"Yes, I am ready," Helen answered dully; then followed Caryl out to the back porch, where Grip Alderson waited with the horses.

"Well, to be sure, I thought you were going to help me finish getting that jam out of the way!" exclaimed Beulah, in no pleased tone, emerging from the kitchen at this juncture, and seeing Helen, as she supposed, setting off for a pleasant evening ride with a friend.

Helen turned her white face round in Beulah's direction, opening her lips to speak, but before she could utter a word Caryl came to the rescue, saying with rather a forced laugh: "It is all right, Beulah. I will come and finish the jam myself when Helen has gone. A poor man she knows well has been hurt in an explosion, and she is going to take care of him. I should have come to tell you about it before, only

we have had to make so much haste. Mind how you go into the store-room, for there is a pot of jam smashed on the floor. I will clear it up presently if you haven't time, only I must go and speak to Father first."

"As if I would let you do it, Miss Caryl, and you with so many irons in the fire!" exclaimed Beulah in high dudgeon; and then, not staying to see Helen ride off with the superintendent, she bustled away in a great hurry to clear up the spilled jam, wondering not a little, as she went, at Helen's sudden journey and its cause.

Caryl found her father alone with the nurse, Mrs. Mason having gone indoors to dress for dinner, as she called it, a ceremony she never omitted under any circumstances, even when the rest of the family were so driven by their work as to find time for no more elaborate toilet than washing their hands:

"Why did Alderson go off in such a hurry, Caryl?" asked the invalid, with a ring of petulance in his tone. "He does not come so often that he need be in such a hurry to be gone again."

Caryl cast a meaning look at the nurse, who rose instantly, saying with a ready smile: "If you can spare ten minutes to sit with your father, Miss Mason, I will go and set the supper table for Beulah."

"Thank you, Nurse! I shall be glad to sit and rest a few minutes, and Beulah will be equally glad of your help," Caryl replied with a little nod of thanks, then turned again to her father, who was reiterating his question as to why Grip Alderson had gone off with so much haste.

Caryl bent over his long chair, her fingers softly stroking his hair. "Daddy, dear, the tangle is sorting

itself out about that business of Giles Harper's by dint of getting more involved than before," she said with a low laugh; then proceeded to tell him of Helen's relationship to Long Jim and Grip Alderson, but remembering to warn him that the secret must be kept a secret still for Philip's sake.

CHAPTER XXI

THE NIGHT JOURNEY

THE ride in to Lethbridge was performed by Helen and Grip almost in silence. Once, when Helen pulled Kitty up a little sharply to let a team go by, and the animal seemed disposed to resent by rearing, he leaned forward and seized the bridle, feeling that in her present condition she was in no fit mood for wrestling with a restive horse.

"Thank you! but I am not afraid," she said, turning her drawn white face to him, whilst a wan smile for a moment curved her lips, but soon left them set as before in rigid lines of pain; then she slid her arm in a coaxing, caressing fashion about the horse's neck, and the creature subsided at once into a steady trot again.

Grip watched her in silence, then shook his head as if doubtful of the wisdom of treating a horse in such a fashion. To him it was like humouring a spoiled child instead of ruling it into order by firm discipline, and he by no means approved of the process; but it was no time now for argument, and so he forbore to speak, only registering a very firm resolve to cure Miss Kitty of that particularly vicious habit of rearing, before he had done with her.

There was just time for him to ride round to the barracks before going on to the depot, where Helen waited for him, and then they boarded the cars for Brunton.

"Did you get any more news?" she asked as he found her a seat and looked after her comfort.

"No, I did not expect to; but I had to make sure that Blake had wired for horses or we might have found ourselves with a six or seven mile walk at the end of the rail journey, and the country is very rough in the neighbourhood of the Ridge."

"You don't know, then, if he is still alive?" she asked with quivering lips.

"No," he said briefly, then was silent again, because he had no comfort to give her.

The cars rattled on over the twilight plain, seemingly hurrying on into the night, and Helen sat staring out at the deepening gloom, thinking of that day when she had seen her father at Lethbridge, and how she had stretched out her hands without avail to him.

If only she could have reached him then it might have made a difference; but now, perhaps it was too late, and she might be journeying through the night only to find a dead father at the end, who could never be won by a daughter's love, or respond to the affection she yearned to bestow upon him.

A roll of thunder greeted their ears when they stepped from the cars at Brunton, and a flicker of lightning showed over the hills towards which their journey trended.

"There is a storm coming up; it is to be hoped we may reach shelter before it breaks, for your sake," Grip Alderson said, as he helped Helen to mount. He had taken the precaution to bring her saddle on the cars with him, so that there was no delay in hunting up a lady's saddle when they left the depot.

"Do you know the way?" Helen asked a little.

nervously, as they set out with their faces towards the black shadows of the hill country.

"I know where the mines are, certainly, and the general lie of the land, so there is no need for you to worry; and if we put our horses along we may even be so fortunate as to finish our journey dry after all," he answered reassuringly.

They had a mile or two of smooth going, and then the way became little better than a cattle track up the hills, down the hills, and round tortuous curves, which seemed to Helen like actual precipices, ending in unfathomable gloom.

Still the storm did not break, though the thunder rolled with an ominous mutter about the hills, and the lightning gleamed and flickered.

"Shall we do the journey before the rain reaches us?" Helen asked presently, when the horses subsided into a walk at a particularly bad bit of hill, and the thunder rolled with a reverberating roar right over their heads.

"Yes, we are almost there. Do you see that light showing in the valley yonder? That is a little store, where we must stop to ask the way, for there are several clusters of miners' shacks about here, and we may very easily waste time in going to the wrong place."

"We may get news too!" said Helen with a little catch of her breath, as a flare of lightning threw out in strong relief the rough building of the store and the little huts clustering about it.

"Yes, I expect we shall," he replied; and now his tone was pitiful exceedingly, for he feared lest the news might be bad, and she had come so far to hear it.

There seemed to be no one about at the store, and though a light shone in the window, the door was locked and barred.

Finding no response to his shouting and knocking, Grip got off his horse, finding his way round to the rear of the building, where apparently his efforts to make someone hear met with better success, for Helen heard him speaking, and then a voice in fainter tones answering.

It seemed a long time before he came back—so long that she was just thinking of slipping from her horse and going in search of him, when she heard his steps returning.

"Well," she ejaculated with feverish impatience, "what have you heard?"

"That your father was still alive at mid-day, and that he is lying in a little hut at Barker's Hope," he answered, swinging himself into the saddle, and turning his horse's head back by the way they had come.

"Where is that?" she asked, wheeling her own animal round also.

"About a mile from here. The nearest way is a path that goes off from the one we came by, a little way back; it is not very bad going either," he answered.

"What else did you hear; and why did you stay so long talking?" she asked, begrudging every moment's delay on the road.

"There was a new-made widow there. I could not leave her without a word," he replied briefly.

"Oh, poor thing! Was her husband one of the victims of the explosion?" said Helen, her sympathies instantly aroused.

"Yes, her husband was the man who was killed on the spot. Rumour said it was Ling, you know, but it

was a mistake; it seems they were waiting for Ling when the explosion occurred. Mealy Money has died since; but your father was farther away, and consequently not so badly knocked about."

"Then he may get better?" she cried with such a sound of hope and jubilation in her voice that he winced at the sound.

"I did not say so. And, Cousin Helen, I think you will not wish him to linger long when you know how much he has been knocked about."

"Ah, poor Father!" she said with a catch in her breath, then was silent again, while he was silent too.

The storm was coming very near now; the thunder rolled incessantly, whilst the lightning flickered and flared as if all the heavens were on fire behind the thick cloud-curtains which hid the stars from sight.

A breath of hot wind slid up from the valley, and fairly seemed to scorch Helen's face, as the horses plunged down a steep hill track under overarching trees. Then, almost before she had time to feel nervous at the situation, the trees were left behind, and they were scrambling up a bare hillside, where, instead of hot wind, a dash of icy-cold rain took her breath for a moment, almost stunning her with its violence.

"Courage, little Cousin! it is only a few steps farther," Grip shouted; then he leaned over, and, catching her horse's bridle, led the animal onward, whilst Helen bowed her head and clung to the neck of her good steed to avoid being swept off by the storm-blast.

Then the horses stopped suddenly, the light of a lantern flashed in her face, and Helen felt herself being lifted from her saddle—dragged down, it seemed to her—and hurried into a stuffy, dark interior.

It was a relief, indeed, to be away from the merciless pelting of the icy rain, and for a moment or so she stood, breathing hard, and trying to recover from the confusion wrought in mind and body by the battering of the storm.

Then a curt voice close at hand asked a question which seemed to still her fluttering nerves and give her back her composure again.

"Did you say that the superintendent had brought a nurse with him? Well, that is good hearing indeed, for we never needed a woman's help more."

"I am not really a nurse, but I have come to take care of my father," she said, moving forward in the direction of the curt voice, which had sounded from the lighted chamber beyond, whilst the room into which she had been hustled so hastily out of the rain was in darkness save for the gleam from the open door of that lighted inner apartment.

"It is not surely possible that you are Long Jim's daughter?" exclaimed the curt voice with a vibration of shocked protest, as the owner of the voice, a stout, farmer-like person, with the smooth, well-kept hands of a surgeon, came forward to greet the new arrival.

"He is my father," Helen said, then moved quickly forward, for her eyes had caught sight of a rude bed in the corner, and lying on it a swathed and bandaged form with yearning, pain-wrung eyes.

Was that Long Jim? Grip Alderson, who had followed Helen into the hut, could scarcely believe the evidence of his own sight, for the face of the man on the pillow had already been purged by keen suffering from most of the evil effects of dissipation and unrestrained temper, and, looking at him as he lay there on his dying bed, it was easy to realize that Long Jim

must have been a very handsome man in the days of his youth.

Helen bent over him, touching with gentle, caressing fingers the uninjured hand which lay outside the rough coverlid.

"Dear Father, I have come to take care of you, and to help you get well; I would have been here sooner if I had known."

"Nellie! Is it really you?" he faltered, with quavering gladness in his unsteady tones. "I saw you come in at the door and stand there in the lamp-light, but I didn't know you were real; I thought I was only a bit off my head."

"Oh, I am very real, as you will soon see!" she said, pulling off her hat and coat, and looping up her riding-skirt in order to be ready for whatever might be required of her. If her heart failed her at all, she was careful to hide the fact, and bent her whole energy and attention to the task that lay before her.

The doctor turned all the men, saving Grip Alderson, out of the room; then set to work, with Helen's help, to make the sufferer more comfortable. It was all that could be done, his injuries being of such a character as to preclude all hope of recovery, though it was possible, even probable, that he might live for a few days.

The hut where he lay was used in part for mining requisites and in part as a residence by the manager of the works, who had, however, vacated it in favour of the injured man.

All the numbed sense of bewilderment and unreality had slipped from Helen now, and she was as alert and resourceful as she had previously been dazed and stupid.

Her experience of previous sick-beds stood her in

good stead now; and though she had never faced a scene like this before, she rose to the occasion with a quiet courage and strength which evoked a curt comment of approval from the back-country surgeon when the work was ended.

"There, I have done what I can for him, the rest is in your hands; and now I must go," he said. Then, turning to Grip, he asked for someone to guide him through the mazes of the hills to the level country beyond. And, Grip going with him, father and daughter were left alone.

CHAPTER XXII

TOWARDS THE NEW DAY

FOR a little time Long Jim lay as if dozing or sunk in a stupor from the exhaustion of being pulled about by the surgeon.

Whilst he lay thus, not needing anything at her hands, Helen devoted herself to the task of doing her best to make the surroundings fit the needs of the circumstances.

A miner's hut is not an ideal sick-room; but Long Jim had known little of luxury or comfort during the years of his outcast, wandering life, and so it was probable that he would feel no lack, although his nurse might suffer no little discomfort in her own person.

The storm appeared to be dying away, though the rain fell in a steady pour on the corrugated iron which roofed the hut.

But there was a small stove in one corner of the room in which a wood fire crackled cheerfully. It was plain that the miners had done what they could for the victim of their blasting operations, and Helen blessed them in her heart as she moved to and fro setting things straight and acquainting herself with the limitations of the sick-chamber. A tea-pot, cup, saucer, canister of tea, and some brown sugar in a paper were ranged on a shelf near the fireplace, whilst a sauce-pan containing something that was

presumably beef-tea hissed and bubbled on the stove. And a kettle of water at the singing stage kept it in countenance, at the same time adding a touch of homely comfort to the scene.

Presently there was a stir and movement on the bed, and Helen turned, to find her father awake, surveying her with a puzzled look in his eyes.

"Is it you, Fanny; I thought the old man wouldn't let you come?" he said in surprised query.

"No, dear, it is not Mother; she is dead, you know. It is only Nellie, your daughter," she said, leaning over him and softly stroking his face.

"Ah, yes, I remember now! but I'd been dreaming of your mother, and you are very like her!" he answered, the cloud clearing from his brain at the sound of her voice.

"Are you in pain now?" she asked, seeing his face contract as if from suffering.

"Not much. I was only remembering how you came in a while ago saying that I was your father and you had come to help me. No one could have blamed you if you had kept the fact to yourself and stayed away, for I'm not the sort of parent a girl has any cause to be proud of," he added bitterly.

His uninjured hand was groping in a restless fashion among the bed-clothes, and she took it in both her own, softly caressing it as if in every way possible she must strive to make him realize how she loved and clung to him.

"Father, don't you remember the day when you were on the cars at Lethbridge, and I saw you and stretched out my hands to you?" she asked gently. "I should not have done that if I had not loved and wanted you then. But you could not stop, and I had

to wait until I heard where you were. Then, when the news came that you were hurt, why, I just dropped everything and came to you."

"Yes, yes, I remember," he broke in with tremulous haste. "I had heard of work that I could do at a place a few miles east, but my reputation had got there before me, and they wouldn't have me at a gift even, and so I had to drift back here and wait for a chance of something to do. I might have gone farther east, where I wasn't known, but I couldn't, somehow, bring my mind to go away, seeing that you wanted me, and so I hung about here—for this."

"Poor Father!" There was a sound of tears in Helen's voice, but her eyes were dry and bright with a joy no mere bodily disaster could quench, for it was plain to her that her love for her father was bearing fruit in making him love her also. Then she said softly: "If only I had known, I could have helped you."

He shook his head. "No, no, I had been helped too often; and, one way and another, it has been the curse of my life. When I was a young man and got into trouble, I always knew that I should be helped out of it somehow, and so I didn't care. But things have gone a bit hard with me of late, and—I say, that doctor is quite sure I sha'n't get better, isn't he?"

Helen hesitated a moment, but the yearning eyes had a compelling quality in their gaze that she could not resist: "He does not think it likely that you can be spared for very long, dear Father, but——"

"I don't want to live," he rejoined hastily. "Though, now you've come, I'd like to hold out for a day or two, just to feel what I might have enjoyed if only I had lived straight and respectable like other men."

"But, Father, I want you to live!" wailed Helen, the pain and longing in her tone bringing a spasm of suffering into his face.

"Better not, little girl, better not. For, pressed by hard times, I had signed on for a piece of wickedness that even you could not have forgiven, and as I had received some of the money in advance, why, it stands to reason I should have been forced to carry it through," he answered wearily.

"Oh, Father, how much did you have?" she cried, with a swift resolution to pay the money and set her father free from the bond of iniquity, even if it took her last dollar to do it.

"Do you think I would tell you? Time has been when I haven't scrupled to lay burdens on those that loved me; but things are different with me now," he said, looking at her with a gaze full of tender affection.

"But, Father, there was some money Philip and I had left over from the sale of Grandfather's things, not much, but enough to put you out of the power of bad men," she pleaded, feeling that she could not rest until that money was refunded, be it much or little.

"It won't matter, child. I can't fill in my contract, and I wouldn't if I could. A few dollars more or less won't impoverish Ling, seeing that his wealth, such as it is, has all been stolen from somebody else."

Long Jim lay back on his pillow with an air of such extreme exhaustion that Helen hastened to administer a cordial that should restore him again.

"Dear Father," she said presently, when the colour had drifted back to his lips again, "I wish so much

that you would tell me why you had such a bitter grudge against Mr. Mason of Tentover!"

"He did me a cruel ill turn once, and through me you. Ah, things might have been different with me but for that! And yet I don't know; perhaps that money would have gone like everything else," he replied in a musing tone. Then, suddenly rousing himself, he asked: "What was it you were saying about Philip? I thought the boy did not outlive his grandfather, but was drowned a long time back."

"He was almost drowned," responded Helen, with a sharp pain at her heart, because the father did not know that his son^d was alive, and the son had no knowledge of the father. "And he has been very much of an invalid ever since; but he is getting better now, and is at Tentover with me. We live at that little wooden house down by the flume."

"Poor lad! I don't think I saw him more than once, or at most twice; for my old father took my wife in and shut his door on me before the boy was born, and I saw little of mother or children afterwards. But it was my own fault." And the man who had sown wild oats for the most part of his life sighed heavily over the harvest.

"Won't you tell me, Father, what the ill turn was that Mr. Mason did you so long ago?" she urged, secretly wondering why he seemed so loath to be communicative on that subject.

"But for him I, through your mother, should have come in for a fortune. Did you ever hear of your mother's uncle, Giles Harper, of Canterbury, England?"

"Uncle Giles? Yes, of course; he died last winter, or was it in the spring, and his will cannot be found.

Philip and I were in correspondence with the solicitors, Bawdrey & Nunn, before I left England; but nothing came of it, because they said they had certain proof that a will had been left. Therefore the estate could not be administered as if he had died intestate, and it would be a long time—years perhaps—before the property would be divided among the next of kin. Uncle Giles had so many nieces and nephews that, after the lawyers have had their picking, the shares of the relatives cannot amount to more than a few pounds each, I should think," Helen answered.

"There was a will, that I know for certain; but whether or not it has been destroyed no one but Reuben Mason can say. Though, as it is not forthcoming, I am disposed to think that he must have destroyed it."

"Father, what do you mean?" cried Helen with a face of amazed wonder.

"What I say," replied the man on the bed in a stolid tone, while there drifted for a moment back over his face the lowering cloud of evil passions.

Helen's hand stole in gentle, caressing fashion across his brow, and under her light touch the cloud lifted and dispersed, leaving only an added bitterness in his tone when he spoke again.

"Now that you know what he has done for me—for us—do you wonder that I wanted to be revenged on him, or why I tried so hard to wreck his irrigation scheme at the only weak point in the system?"

"But how did you come to know all this?" Helen asked, ignoring his question, or rather not choosing to answer it.

He laughed in a hard, mirthless fashion. "I will tell you. I might hesitate to do so through fear of

making a bad impression, and so running the risk of losing your affection, but you know so much evil of your father already that a little more or less cannot make much difference either way. I used to be rather a favourite of old Giles Harper's in the days when I was courting your mother. 'Handsome Francis' was the name he always called me by, and I flatter myself I deserved it then, though no one would call me handsome now, or think me so either. He never called me by my first name, James, because he hated it for some reason or other, and he was as eccentric then as it was possible for a sane man to be. In fact I often used to wonder if he was quite all there."

"Take a little rest, dear Father," interposed Helen as his voice grew faint from exhaustion; then she went to the sauce-pan of simmering beef-tea and brought him a little in a cup.

But a talking fit was on him, and now that he had made the plunge into the story he seemed anxious to finish the telling of it, and, after swallowing a few spoonfuls of the beef-tea, went on, with a tinge of bitterness in his tone:—

"But I had been married only a very short time when I fancied the old fellow's manner began to change towards me, and being very anxious, for obvious reasons, to stand well with him, I thought I would make a little journey down to Canterbury to see him. I was acting as bailiff for a farmer up in West Kent then, so took a trip down by train when my day's work was done. I was told by the house-keeper, who opened the door to me, that the old fellow had company to dine and sleep that night—a young man named Mason—and she did not think Mr. Harper would care to see any more visitors then, as he had

been making his will and was talking it over with his guest."

"That was Mr. Mason of Tentover, I suppose?" Helen said.

"Yes, young Reub your mother used to call him, and as I always fancied he liked her more than ordinary, I hated him accordingly. I didn't mean to show up, seeing that he was there, so I asked the housekeeper if she would give me a cup of tea in the kitchen, saying that, as the old man had company, I should take the next train back. But I did not. Instead, I sneaked round into the garden, and, standing with my ear to a cracked pane of glass, I heard every word of that will read by old Giles to his visitor. There were a good few legacies, small ones, and then the bulk of his property was to be divided between his two dear nieces, Kate and Fanny. Kate, you know, was your mother's sister, who made a runaway match with some poor sick fellow with one foot in his grave. Let me see, what was his name: Adamson, Allenson, or something of that kind!"

"It was Alderson," interposed Helen quietly, "John Griffith Alderson, the father of the man who brought me here to-night."

"Not Grip Alderson's father, surely?" exclaimed the injured man with a thrill of horror in his voice.

"Yes, it is. Mr. Alderson told me of the relationship some time ago, but I would not admit it until to-night, when I needed a friend so badly," replied Helen, who had not looked at her watch, and so did not know that midnight was past, and her feet already towards a new day.

"Grip Alderson my nephew! Why, it is unbelievable!" gasped Long Jim; and then the perspiration



oozed in large drops from his forehead, whilst he lay panting for breath and trying to look this new fact in the face.

"Father, I cannot have you exciting yourself like this; it will make you worse," exclaimed Helen, keenly distressed by his agitation, the cause for which she could not even guess.

"It won't hurt me; not in the way you think," he panted. "But I have got to get used to the surprise of it all. Does he know that I am his uncle? From what I've ever seen or heard of him I should not think that he would be very proud of the connection."

"Oh, yes, he knows!" Helen said quickly, and feeling a very warm gratitude towards the kinsman who had proved himself so well worthy of the name that night.

Long Jim lay silent for a time, as if pondering still the piece of news just imparted to him, whilst Helen moved softly about the room replenishing the fire and doing the necessary things which might serve to keep the sufferer as comfortable as possible.

A sound of subdued snoring came from the room beyond, where the miners' tools and other effects were stored, and it was no small comfort to her to feel that there was someone within call should a change for the worse take place in her father.

"Nellie, come here and sit beside me. I haven't finished telling you about that affair of Giles Harper's will yet," he said weakly.

"I am so anxious for you to sleep for a little while, Father; then you can talk to me again when the morning comes," she replied, coming to stand over him, endeavouring to soothe him to slumber.

"All in good time, and there is not much more to

tell. I got into trouble very soon after that, and lost some money at cards that was ~~not~~ mine to lose. Not knowing where to turn for money, and being desperately afraid of exposure and its consequent disgrace, I wrote to old Giles asking for a loan."

"Did you get it?" Helen asked.

"Not a bit of it. Instead, the old man read me a lengthy lecture on living within my means, and told me I might not even benefit by his death unless I behaved myself, for he had entrusted his will to the custody of Reuben Mason, with instructions to destroy it if he (Mason) was not satisfied with my manner of life."

"What a strange thing to do!" exclaimed Helen.

"I told you old Giles was a crank," said her father, but his tone was shorn of its bitterness now, and distinctly drowsy; so she purposely refrained from replying, sitting silently by his side and having the satisfaction presently of seeing him slip into a gentle doze.

For a long time she sat without moving, her hand lightly clasping that uninjured one of her father's, and her thoughts so busy that, tired though she was from all the fatigue and emotional strain through which she had passed, she had still no desire for sleep.

The action of Mr. Mason in destroying the will of old Giles Harper puzzled her greatly. Of course she understood that he was quite within his rights in doing it if he had the old man's special instructions to use his discretion in the matter; and she knew that her great-uncle had been absolutely incapable of attending to his own affairs for many years previous to his death.

But there was keen injustice in the action from her

point of view, and she could not see it right that other people should have to suffer because her father had led a wild and dissipated life; more especially as, according to his own statement, he was not to benefit directly by the will, only through his relationship to her mother. Then there was the co-heiress, Kate, and at the thought of her, Helen gave a little gasp of dismay, since Grip Alderson, the cousin who had been kind to her as a brother, must also suffer because her father had not lived a straight, upright life.

What a tangle it all was, and what a mystery life seemed to her as she sat there in the dimly-lighted sick-room, listening to her father's laboured breathing and the subdued snoring from the outer chamber!

At stated intervals she roused her patient to take nourishment, but he dozed again directly his head touched the pillow. She even grew drowsy herself as the hours dragged on, and was sitting with her head leaning against the wall, fancying herself back at Tentover in the little cabin by the flume, when a knock came at the door, soft at first, then louder and more insistent, until she started up, wide-awake, and dreadfully ashamed at having slept at her post.

A glance at her patient showed him to be quietly asleep still, and, slipping her hand gently from his clasp, she rose and crossed the floor to the door.

The dawn was coming slowly over the hills, and the chill gray light shone coldly in at the dirty uncurtained window, but the air was fresh and sweet from the night's rain, and it came with reviving force to Helen as she opened the door to answer that persistent knocking.

Grip Alderson stood there, with a word of apology for disturbing her. "It was too bad to disturb you,

but I am starting back for Lethbridge, and I wanted to know if there was any message that I could take for you to Tentover. Do you want Philip summoned?"

"No," she answered after a pause, "I will not risk it unless Father asks for him urgently. "You see, Philip has no idea that he has a father at all, whilst until a few hours ago my father did not know that he had a son living, and—and I am afraid of the results."

"I understand," he said, nodding his head in sympathy for the faltering break in her voice. "But I think you are wrong, Cousin Helen. Why shouldn't the boy have an equal chance with you of accepting or rejecting his father?"

"Because I am afraid he would reject him," she whispered hoarsely, stepping out farther from the door of the sick-room, so that there might be no danger of her father waking to hear what she was saying. "You see, it is not as if Father had been as other men."

"There is that to be thought of certainly," he admitted, feeling that if he were in Philip's place perhaps he would not care to have a father like Long Jim thrust upon him without a word of previous warning.

"I could not bear for Father to be grieved or troubled about anything now," Helen went on passionately, "and so it seemed better to me to leave Philip in ignorance now, until all is over and I go back again. Then I can tell him myself."

"Suppose the information reaches him from an outside source?" suggested Grip, still dubious concerning the wisdom of such a course.

"I must risk it. Rumour does not fly very fast in

this part of the world," she replied with a wan little smile.

"What sort of a night has he had?" asked Grip, with a nod in the direction of the room beyond.

"Very quiet; he has been sleeping more or less for the last three hours. I could almost think he was getting better, if I did not know," she said, her voice breaking in a sob.

"I shall come back to-night, or to-morrow morning early," he said, moving as if to go. "I only wish that it had been possible to get a woman up here to help you; but women are scarce in this part of the world—even that poor soul yonder, at the store; has no one to stay with her in her trouble. But I've spoken to the mine manager, and he will see that there is a man told off to wait on you and do what he can for you."

"Thank you!" Helen replied gratefully; and then she went back to her post, wondering what she could have done but for this cousin, who seemed to have been specially provided for her help in this time of need.

Long Jim was awake when she reached his bedside again, and there were many things to do for his comfort. Whilst she was still busy with these small duties the doctor arrived on the scene again, wearing a creased and crumpled air, as if he had been working and riding all night.

He overhauled Long Jim with those tender, capable hands, which were so soft and gentle in their strength, then stood looking thoughtfully down on his patient.

"Well," said the injured man, who was panting from the exertion of being moved by even such experienced hands, "how much longer do you reckon I've got, Doctor?"

"Two days, perhaps three. But I'm not sure, and that being so, if you want to see a parson, or anyone of that sort, you'd best send for him to-day," the surgeon answered, without any beating about the bush, or raising of false hopes which had no chance of ever being realized.

"No, I don't want a parson," Long Jim answered slowly. "My little girl has done more towards helping me get ready for another world than a parson could if he came now, and kept on talking to the end."

"How?" asked the surgeon brusquely, with a sharp glance at Helen, who was busy at the stove.

"Well, you see, she wasn't ashamed to come here and own up that I was her father, and that she loved me, when it would have been easy enough for her to have stayed quiet and said nothing. People wouldn't have blamed her either, seeing I'm not the sort of person a nice girl could be proud of claiming kin to. And I've thought that if she, being human, could love like that, in spite of all that is past, why, the Saviour who died for the world wouldn't be beaten in loving-kindness by a girl, and so I'm not afraid."

The doctor turned away without another word. He had seen many a troubled passing, and ministered to the close of many a rough and ill-spent life, but it is safe to say he had never touched on a scene like this before, and the pathos of it moved him greatly.

Helen followed him to the outer room, halting there among the confusion of stores and tools to hear what his latest word would be regarding the condition of his patient.

He repeated to her what he had said to Long Jim regarding the time there might be left, then, laying his hand gently on her arm, he said emphatically:

"But whether it comes to-day or three days hence, you have nothing to regret—nothing. And, my dear child, if all girls loved their fathers as you have loved yours, there might be fewer tragedies in life, and fewer endings in the dark."

"But I have not always loved him, poor Father! I did not have the chance," she murmured, her eyes growing misty with unshed tears.

"Well, you took the chance when it came; let that comfort you. And be grateful that you loved him in time to do him good," replied the surgeon; and then he went away.

CHAPTER XXIII

A CONFIDENCE

WHEN Eremus Kaye and Philip returned with Betty from their berry-picking expedition they were not a little surprised to find that Helen had gone off with Grip Alderson to nurse the victims of a mine explosion.

"I don't see why you should all look so amazed," Caryl said, gazing round on their bewildered faces when she had made her explanation. "Helen is good and generous enough to volunteer for any self-sacrificing work, and, as I could spare her comfortably, she has gone. I may even take a trip down that way myself to-morrow, to find out how she is getting on."

"It is the suddenness of the going that took my breath away, though I have known Helen do stranger things even than this," Philip replied with a shrug.

But Eremus Kaye turned away without a word, and, seeing a little pile of letters waiting for him, carried them off to his room to read in private.

He was back again, however, before Betty and Philip had done asking Caryl questions about the manner and reason of Helen's sudden flight.

"I have had a summons to the city," he said briefly, waving an open letter which he held in his hand. "Mrs. Kaye is ill, and—there are other things."

"What a shame to cut your holiday short! And you have worked so hard all harvest that it would

have been only fair for you to stop and have a little play!" cried Betty in tones of keen disappointment.

"It would not have been so bad if only——" began Caryl, then stopped suddenly. She had been thinking of Helen and the castles in the air which she had been building for her friend and Eremus to inhabit, and was only prevented just in time from saying what was much better left unsaid.

For the first time since his accident Mr. Mason took supper with his family that night, his long chair being wheeled into the dining-room for that purpose. His presence at table did them all good, hiding the gap caused by Helen's absence, and keeping them from feeling by anticipation the further blank that must be experienced when Mr. Kaye took his departure.

"You will have to stay up here to-night, young man," Mr. Mason said to Philip, who was waiting upon him; "for I should not be comfortable to think of you staying in that lonely place by yourself. Besides, there is no need for anyone down there now, for I hear that Long Jim is one of the victims your plucky sister has gone to nurse, and with that man *hors de combat* I reckon my flume is safe enough."

"Thank you, sir! I shall be very glad to stay, for I have no great leaning to the life of a hermit, and the solitude of Swallow Creek is apt to pall upon one if taken in too large doses," Philip answered readily.

"We shall be very glad to have you," Mrs. Mason said in a cordial tone; for she had taken a strong liking to Philip, although her feeling for Helen had never got beyond a polite toleration.

A glow of pleasure came into Philip's face, for his heart was always at Tentover, even when his body

was away from it, and it was pleasant indeed to have his inclination and himself in one place.


Then Eremus Kaye looked across the table at Caryl, who sat opposite, asking, with some trepidation in his usually easy manner: "Won't you come for a stroll after supper; it is my last night in the country, you know?"

"Yes, I will come, if you don't want to go too far; but I do not feel in any urgent need of outdoor exercise," Caryl replied; then suddenly blushed a hot, distressful crimson as she caught her mother's eyes fixed on her with a pleading, imploring gaze.

It was so terribly embarrassing to her that her mother should be so set on a marriage between her and Eremus Kaye, and for one dreadful moment a chill horror shook her lest Eremus might have got the same notion in his head.

But she quickly recovered her composure on remembering how very friendly, yet exceedingly unloverlike his manner to her had always been. Then, stealing a look at the worried expression of his face, a wonder crept into her mind as to whether he might not want to talk to her about Helen, in which case she would be only too glad to receive his confidence, remembering, as she did, the unconscious betrayal of Helen's manner when she begged that Mr. Kaye should not be sent to see how she was faring in her self-appointed task of nursing her father.

Supper was late that evening, and it was quite dark when Caryl joined Eremus Kaye on the veranda, going down the steps with him to pace slowly up and down the gravel walk between the rose-trees. Distant thunder was rolling and muttering, and the lightning flickered among the masses of dark clouds



edging the western horizon, but the night was warm and pleasant, without the sultriness which forebodes a coming storm.

"We shall be sorry to lose you to-morrow," Caryl said, breaking a silence which was growing oppressive and making her nervous.

"I shall be very sorry to go," he responded warmly. "My Tentover visits have always been times of unadulterated enjoyment, but this summer there has been even more. Do you know, I had rather bad news in my mail to-night," he added abruptly, his voice taking suddenly a harsh, grating tone.

"Do you mean about Mrs. Kaye's illness?" she asked with a quick sympathy for all the troubles that rather erratic individual had brought him.

"No, for I fancy she is not seriously indisposed; only ill because she is worried, and does not know which way to turn to get out of the muddle into which she has blundered. The foolish woman has been speculating, with most disastrous results, too, and I have to pay the penalty," he answered, still with that grating intonation which fairly set her teeth on edge.

"Oh, Eremus, I am sorry for you! But is it always necessary that you should have to bear the brunt of Mrs. Kaye's un wisdom?" she cried impulsively.

"It is in this case, since I cannot see my father's children come to want. But it will make a comparatively poor man of me for some years to come; and I had been hoping for something very different," he said moodily.

"I think it is very hard that you should have to pay for Mrs. Kaye's folly in this fashion," Caryl flamed out indignantly. "Why don't you marry and set up a

separate establishment, then you could cut yourself adrift from your stepmother, and insist upon her living within the limits of her own income."

"That is precisely what I had wanted to do; but after the struggling life Helen has had, I could not ask her to share my poverty," he said almost savagely, the confidence slipping from him as naturally as if Caryl had been a friendly sister instead of merely a sisterly friend.

"I think it is very unfair not to ask her," Caryl said with decision; "for then, at least, she would have some choice in the matter, and be able to do as she likes about the poverty. As it is, she must just go on eating her heart out to no purpose at all, because, being a woman, she may not ask for what she wants."

"How do you know that she wants—anything of the sort?" he asked quickly.

"I don't know. I am only stating her position if she does. Though I fancy her chief objection would lie just now in her own unfitness, as she would reckon it, to mate with anyone of respectable lineage," Caryl replied with a quickening of her pulses.

"What do you mean?" he asked brusquely.

She hesitated a moment before replying, wondering if she had any right to betray Helen's confidence regarding the detrimental father; then, remembering that the fact would be common property sooner or later, decided that it would be better he should be told now, as in the event of his fastidious pride revolting at the thought of Long Jim for a father-in-law, he could go away, leaving things as they were.

Eremus listened in silence while Caryl told him of the disclosures made by Helen on hearing of the accident to Long Jim, only remarking, when she had done:

"Then if I go back to the city to-morrow, leaving things as they are now, it is more than probable that Helen will believe I have gone away owing to the fact that she has found and acknowledged this detrimental father."

"I should say so," Caryl replied with a judicial air; and a thrill of satisfaction and delight went through her heart as she reflected that she, in her own person, was the finger of Fate to bring these two friends of hers together.

"Look here, Caryl, where is this place? Wide of Brunton you said, I think? Couldn't I go down there first thing to-morrow morning, and see Helen, before going on to the city?" he suggested in such a flurry of impatience that she smiled to herself in the dark, as she paced the rose-walk at his side.

"No, you could not do that; it would embarrass Helen too terribly to have you walking in upon her at such a time. Then think, too, how horribly it would jar on her feelings to have you flurrying her with a proposal of marriage while she is watching by her father's dying bed. But I am going to see her to-morrow, and I could take her a message from you, or——"

"Or a letter?" he suggested quickly.

"Or a letter; but it must be one that does not call for an immediate answer," she amended quietly.

Then a soft, eager voice called to them from the veranda at the other end of the rose-walk: "Young people, are you going to stay out there much longer; don't you know that it is beginning to rain?"

"Why, so it is!" exclaimed Caryl in surprise, as an advance drop splashed on to her forehead; then she called back: "We are coming at once, Mother."

"I am very grateful to you, Caryl; you have always been like a real sister to me," the man said in a low, moved tone, as he strode by her side back through the soft gloom towards the house.

"And you have been a brother to me," she responded quickly. "I shall never forget those lonely years when I was at school in the city; you were all the comfort I had then, Ereemus, and but for you I think my heart would have broken."

"You don't love the city," he said with a laugh.

"It is stronger than that; I loathe it," she responded with a shiver. "That is where I disappoint my mother so. The city is life to her, but to me it is death, and I think if I knew that I had to live there always I should just pine away and be dead in a very short time."

Ereemus laughed. "I don't think anyone could find you really disappointing; I am sure that I have never done so, though you were wont to shed such floods of home-sick tears every time you saw a corn-field or a hay-stack back in those years when I used to take you for drives on half-holidays."

"Caryl," said Mrs. Mason, coming to meet them as they came up the veranda steps, "Caryl, a wonderful thing has happened!"

"What is it, Mother?" the girl asked, thankful for anything that should serve to divert her mother's thoughts from herself just then.

"Your father has walked across his bedroom, leaning only on Philip's arm. It was like a miracle! But the joy of it has broken him down, and he is crying like a little child. Go to him at once, dear, for no one can soothe him so quickly as you, and I am sure so much excitement must be bad for him."

Caryl darted away with a glad little cry of joy. Her father had made no attempt to use his limbs, declaring that there was no power in them; but if he could walk, then the strength must have come back, and now he might be speedily well again.

CHAPTER XXIV

TO AVERT A TRAGEDY

CARYL stepped off the cars at Brunton, and looked about her with an anxious air. She had brought a bag of comforts for the invalid with her, and was wondering how it would be possible to get it to the hills.

The prospect of a seven or eight miles' walk was not inviting in any case on such a warm day, but if the bag had to be carried too, then the journey would be a toil indeed.

A solitary official was sauntering about the depot, as if in search of the wherewithal to kill the lagging hours, and of him she made prompt enquiry as to the best means of conveying herself and her bag to her destination.

But his ideas on the subject were so nebulous that, at the sight of a team approaching the depot with a load of corn, she turned abruptly from him and hurried forward to interview the driver of the wagon.

Yes, he knew where the mines were, he told her; at least they would be mines later on; at present they were little more than trial workings, though he believed that one or two good seams of coal had been found.

"I want to go there at once. Can you tell me where I can hire a horse?" Caryl asked, looking over the team with a critical eye, and deciding that if the worst came

to the worst she could make shift with the white-nosed animal on the right.

"There's plenty of horses to be had hereabouts," the man replied vaguely; "only they are not to say used to carrying ladies."

"Oh, that does not matter! If a horse has been used to carrying anything on its back, I expect it will carry me all right," she answered briskly. "Will you let me have the loan of that white-nosed animal until to-morrow morning, if I pay you for it?"

The man looked her over from head to foot with a gaze as critical as her own had been when she examined the merits of his team.

"I don't know," he said with perceptible hesitation. "You look all right; but then ladies don't ever go to the mines, and it ain't to say worth while that they should, seeing what a lot of the worst sort of rogues there are about there nowadays."

"Ladies do go sometimes. A friend of mine went there yesterday to nurse that poor man who was hurt in the mine explosion, and I want to go up and see how she is getting on. Mr. Alderson, the district superintendent, told me I should find her at a part of the mines called Barker's Hope," Caryl explained with a smile.

"Ah! I saw Grip Alderson on the depot last night with a lady. Say, now, did she go up to the mines on purpose to nurse Long Jim?" demanded the man in gaping surprise.

"Yes, and she is there now; that is why I am so anxious to go and see her. Are you going to let me have that horse, and what are you going to charge me?" Caryl said, growing impatient because of the time that was being wasted.

"Oh, you can have the hoss if Grip Alderson knows you! I'll be safe to get my money all right," the man answered with a wide-reaching grin.

"But how much are you going to charge? I can't buy a pig in a poke in this fashion," she said, anxious to get away as soon as she could.

"Oh, you can give me a couple of dollars, and leave the creature at the depot here if I ain't hanging round when you come back to-morrow!" he answered easily; then suddenly enquired: "What'll you do about a saddle?"

"Oh, I brought one with me!" she replied with a laugh. "It is the same saddle that Mr. Alderson brought from Lethbridge with him last night for my friend. It is waiting beside my bag in the depot yonder."

"All right! I'll just hitch along to the depot and unyoke the hoss for you there. I sha'n't keep you waiting ten minutes," he said. And he was as good as his word, saddling the horse for her himself, strapping the bag on the front of the saddle, and giving her the most minute directions concerning the route to Barker's Hope.

"I shall find it, I expect. I have the bump of locality pretty well developed, and can mostly find my way about," she said, paying the price agreed upon, and mounting the white-nosed animal by means of a convenient stump.

"I guess that bag wasn't bought yesterday," said the man, as he gave another hitch to the strap which held that article in place.

"No, indeed, it was not. My father had the bag given him when he was a young man. It is made of pig-skin, and is very strong; but it has not been much

used for many years. I brought it with me because, you see, it fits so well upon the saddle."

"Ah, that it do! I was thinking the same thing myself," he said, falling back a pace to give the white-nosed animal room to move off in good style. Then he cried out another direction or two until she was out of earshot, standing stock-still in the road to watch her until she and the horse dwindled to mere specks in the distance.

Caryl was quite right when she had spoken of having the bump of locality developed to quite an unusual degree; and however strange the country, she usually succeeded in finding her way to the place where she wanted to go. The horse, too, was of the intelligent kind that is rarely at a loss; only, as she speedily found, the poor creature was too tired to have any pace-making capacity left in it, and she was forced to amble along at a jog-trot when her desires all tended towards a smart canter.

The letter written by Eremus Kaye to Helen she carried in her bosom for safety, regarding it as a thing much too precious to be put in her pocket or the bag. It was thrilling to think she was for the nonce an embodiment of Fate, carrying the happiness of two people in her grasp, and every bit of romantic sentiment in her nature was roused by that part of her errand.

She had driven Eremus Kaye to the depot at Lethbridge that morning, and, leaving him to board the eastward-bound train, had herself come south for Helen's sake. Meeting Grip Alderson in the town, she had learned from him of the hopeless condition of Long Jim, and the exact position of Barker's Hope so far as it could be told in words.

"I shall come out to-night by the last train, for there are many things needing attention in that direction," he said, with a smile, as he had parted from her.

She was thinking of his words with secret pleasure as she rode along on the white-nosed horse, and little dreaming of the torture they would bring her later on.

So slowly did the horse go before the journey was done that Caryl did not reach Barker's Hope until the afternoon was well on its way. There was one advantage in the slowness of her progress that she did not fully realize at the time, since it gave her an opportunity of thoroughly understanding the road which lay between Barker's Hope and the railway.

Helen came out of the two-roomed hut to greet her, when at length the tired white-nosed animal came to a stand before the manager's house at Barker's Hope. It was a very weary white-faced Helen, but there was a look of peace, of exaltation even, on her face which Caryl was quick to note as she slid from her saddle to greet her friend.

"Oh, Caryl, you should not have come! There is no place for you to sleep in, there is nothing fit for you to eat, and Mrs. Mason would be horrified to think of you amid such surroundings," protested Helen's tongue; but her eyes told another story of relief and thankfulness at having a sister-woman within call.

"Then I will do without sleeping, or eating either, while I stay. I should have been here sooner but for that horse, which has little more go in it, poor thing, than a rusty gate-hinge. But, Helen, how is your father?"

Helen's lips quivered. The strain on her had been

very great, but the time for breakdown was not yet; and, beyond the quivering, there was no sign about her of weakening strength or flagging courage.

"He does not suffer much now. Indeed he is asleep most of the time," Helen said, leading the way into the tool-shed, which was the ante-chamber to Long Jim's sick-room.

"What a place; and you were here last night all alone! Helen, how did you bear it?" Caryl asked with an exclamation of dismayed disgust as she gazed about her.

"I did not even think of it. And I was not alone, for there was a man sleeping in here who snored in a most comforting, reassuring fashion the whole night through. Then Cousin Grip was about somewhere, and came in for an hour in the dawning before he had to leave for Brunton. He would have been with me all the time but for the fact that there is a poor woman not far from here who is in even worse case than I am," Helen answered.

"Who is she?" asked the other girl, who was busy unpacking from her bag the linen, food, and other things which she had brought from Tentover for the use of the invalid.

"The wife, or rather widow, of the man who was killed on the spot. She lives at a lonely little store about a mile from here. Caryl, are you too tired to go to her before the night comes? It would be an act of the truest Christian charity, for she is there alone with her dead husband, with no woman to do anything for her, or even speak a kind word. I have been thinking of her ever since Grip told me about her, and I would have gone to her myself if I could have left my father."

"I will go, of course, and at once," said Caryl, rising to her feet and leaving the bag half-unpacked. "You can attend to these things, Helen. That box has grapes in it, and Mother put lint and bandages into the bottom of the bag, because she feared you might need them."

"How good you all are to me!" Helen exclaimed with a catch in her voice, as she realized how little difference her revelation as to her parentage had made to these friends of hers, except to render them even kinder to her than they were before.

"And how good you have always been to us! But, before I go, there is something else I must give you—a letter that Eremus Kaye entrusted to my care for you. He has been summoned back to Toronto because of some money troubles in which that odious Mrs. Kaye has involved herself, but he could not go without leaving something more than a message for you."

"Oh, Caryl, does he—Mr. Kaye—know about Father?" Helen asked, a spasm of pain clutching at her heart and contracting her face.

"Yes, for I told him myself when he did me the honour to take me into his confidence. But about this poor woman, Helen; what is her name, and where am I to find her?"

"Her name is Moore, and she lives at a lonely little store on the road to Waterton, about a quarter of a mile, perhaps, from where this track to Barker's Hope turns off," Helen answered, as she stood with a strangely dazed expression on her face and Eremus Kaye's letter tightly clasped in her hand.

"I will find her, but I shall walk, for that horse I rode up here from Brunton is just no good at all. It has simply no go in it. I fancy the poor thing has

been fairly worked off its legs. When I come back, Helen, I shall take your place, and insist upon your lying down for a time, for you look worn out," Caryl said, as she turned away from the door, little guessing how long it would be, or what would have happened, before she reached that door again.

"I shall be very glad to have your company; but I shall not leave my father while he needs me," Helen replied with a sad significance, which showed how thoroughly she realized Long Jim's condition and its utter hopelessness. Then, when Caryl had disappeared from sight, walking briskly round the bend of the path, she stole softly into her father's room to make sure he was sleeping still, and afterwards sat down on an upturned bucket, which was the only seat the hut possessed, and opened the letter which Caryl had brought to her from Eremus Kaye.

It was brief and to the point, as such a man's letter would certainly be; but her head remained bowed over it longer than it would have taken to read fifty letters of an ordinary sort.

Then a movement from the bed caused her to turn quickly to her father, who was rousing from the heavy sleep in which he had lain so long.

He asked for drink, because his throat was parched, but when he turned away from the beef-tea she held to his lips, after swallowing only one mouthful, Helen remembered that Caryl had spoken of there being grapes in the bag, and stepped into the next room, from whence she returned, bringing the bag with her.

The box in which the grapes were packed was a wooden one, and it was wedged so tightly into one corner of the bag that in getting it out she tore a

great hole in the lining, which, being made of less durable stuff than the outer pig-skin, had grown rotten with age.

But she did not stay to enquire into the damage then, being only concerned that her father should have the grapes without delay.

He revived considerably after taking some of them, even rousing to ask where she had contrived to procure grapes, a luxury he had not tasted, or even seen, for years.

"Caryl Mason brought them from Tentover, with jelly, arrow-root, linen, and numberless other little comforts for you, dear," Helen answered, putting Eremus Kaye and his letter resolutely out of her thoughts, whilst she devoted herself to ministering to her father's wants.

"Is she here—Miss Mason?" asked Long Jim with a very evident shrinking.

"She was, a little while ago, and she will be back again presently, but she has gone over to the store to say a kind word to poor Mrs. Moore," Helen replied.

"Gone over there, has she, and alone?" he asked uneasily.

"Yes. Why not?" she asked, the flicker of anxiety in his eyes being quickly reflected in her own.

"It is no place for a girl. They are a bad lot, those Moores; at least the man is, though the woman is one of the meek sort who count for nothing either way," he replied with a restless movement.

"But, Father, don't you remember, the man is dead, was killed in the explosion when you were hurt, and his wife is alone; so Caryl has gone to say a kind word to her, for it is so hard to be in such sorrow and with no one to speak a word of consolation," Helen

said, with an uneasy wish in her own mind that she had never spoken to Caryl about going.

"I hope she will be back soon. It is no place for a girl." He was restlessly plucking at the coverlet; then, after a moment's pause, he broke out again: "What made her come up here at all after what has gone before, and all the harm I have tried to do the lot of them?"

"Caryl has been very good to me. I told you, Father dear, before, that the Masons were some of the kindest friends I have had; and, that being so, it is only natural she should come to help me now," Helen said quietly, though the growing excitement in her father's face made her uneasy, for it was of all things necessary that he should be kept from agitating himself.

"Helen, Helen, child, did you ever know or guess that there was murder in my heart that night away back in the spring, when Mason of Tentover got his bad fall?" he asked, his fingers twitching more restlessly than before.

"Hush, dear! no need to talk of that now; it is long past and done with," she said soothingly, though her heart beat the faster, and there was a noise in her ears that made her confused and giddy.

"Better to say it out and done with it, since confession, I take it, is the first fruit of penitence, and I have long since repented that act of madness. I meant to do harm that night, and I cleared the way for it purposely; but a miracle took place to save me from adding a crime so foul to the list of my evil deeds, and Reuben Mason's accident was the happiest thing for him, and me too, that could possibly have happened that night. I wish that girl would come

back, though. Moore's store is no place for her to go to, whether the man himself is dead or alive. Why, Ling is in hiding there, and has been for a long time. It was him we were waiting for in the cave that morning when the explosion came."

"Father, dear, don't talk any more now; it is not good for you," Helen urged gently; and then, when she had induced him to be quiet for a time, slumber stole over him again, and he dozed fitfully.

Helen went to the outer door then, and stood looking along the trail, longing for Caryl's return or the approach of someone who might be sent in search of her.

The afternoon was wearing fast into evening, but the sun was shining still, and the place was absolutely quiet and deserted, for the men were at work to-day on a part of the seam remote from Barker's Hope, so there was no one at all in the little upland valley saving herself and her father.

When Caryl left the hut she swung along at a vigorous pace, finding the walk an actual relief after her long and tedious ride. There was no difficulty about the road either, which was well defined and easy to follow, though it was no better than an ordinary foot-path until it reached its junction with the Waterton road. Soon after this point was passed she saw in the distance the lonely store which was her goal.

Her steps slackened then; from a feeling of girlish diffidence at thrusting herself, as it were, right into the midst of a stranger's sorrow; but when she remembered how lonely that stranger was she went forward again briskly as before.

A few lean fowls were pecking about the doorway, and a mangy cur, lying sunning itself in the dust,

just lifted its head and snarled at her approach, but seemed to lack the energy for a more active demonstration of ill-will.

Having opened the door and walked into the store proper, ringing the cracked bell suspended from the latch until she was tired, Caryl passed round the rough apology for a counter and entered the room beyond.

A woman was there, lying on a rough settee asleep, worn out apparently with grieving, for her eyes were red and swollen from weeping, and even in her slumber she caught her breath in irrepressible sobs.

Caryl walked up to her and laid a gentle hand on her shoulder. At another time she might have hesitated about rousing the poor creature, but she could not stay very long, and she argued Mrs. Moore could easily sleep again when she was gone.

But the touch, gentle as it was, produced quite a startling sensation on the sleeper, who sprang up in a state of wild fright, crying and moaning that it was not her fault, that she had only learned of the crime from words dropped by chance in her hearing, and therefore could not be held accountable for the evil deed when done.

"What evil deed?" asked Caryl, who was soothing the poor frightened woman with caressing pats, as one might comfort a child suffering from nightmare.

"Who are you?" demanded the woman, shaking off the torpor of her heavy sleep and glaring at the stranger with dismayed suspicion in her tear-washed eyes.

"No one you need be afraid of," Caryl answered reassuringly. "I know of your trouble, and looked in to say a word of sympathy, that's all. My friend,

who is nursing her father over at Barker's Hope, has been worrying about you all day, because Mr. Alderson told her of your sorrow and desolation last night."

"Grip Alderson! Do you know him?" gasped the woman suddenly, sitting straight up, whilst an eager light shone in her eyes.

"Yes, certainly, I know him well," Caryl answered with a little fluttering of her pulses, because of the strange excitement of the woman's manner.

"And would you do him a good turn if you could? Do you care for him enough to make an effort to save his life?" demanded the woman, breathing hard as if she had been running, whilst she fairly shook with eagerness.

Every particle of colour faded from Caryl's cheeks; even her lips lost their ruddy hue, and for a moment she swayed as if she would have fallen, then asked sternly: "What do you mean, Mrs. Moore?"

The woman flung up her gnarled work-worn hands with an impatient gesture. "I can't tell you what I mean until I know whether you are to be trusted, for there's risk, I tell you, in the business, and it isn't likely you would want to take it unless you cared for the man."

A sob came up in Caryl's throat, and almost choked her, but she did not hesitate, did not even stay to think how dreadful it was to have her carefully cherished secret wrung from her in this fashion by an utter stranger, only answered with low, passionate earnestness: "I do care for him, and I will cheerfully risk my life to save Grip Alderson's if you will only tell me how."

"Then sure I am that God Himself must have sent

you here to-day in answer to my prayers, for I've been near crazed with knowing of his danger and yet not able, as it were, to lift a finger to save him," the woman said with a dry, hard sob of relief; but there were no tears in her eyes, for she had none left to shed.

"Tell me quickly what it is I have to do," panted Caryl, her eyes shining with a soft and tender light, though her face was ghastly in its pallor still.

"He is coming from Brunton to-night to Barker's Hope. He told me so himself, and there is a plot arranged to set on him and shoot him in the timber valley as he comes through," said the woman in a low fearful tone as she looked about her to make sure no one else could hear her words.

Caryl clenched her hands tightly to keep from screaming, standing with every muscle strained to its extreme of endurance. "What must I do?" she asked, her voice sounding faint and far away, because of the loud beating of her heart.

"You must get away to Brunton as fast as you can walk, but not by the timber valley, lest you meet those who may stop you from warning Grip Alderson of his danger. And when you meet him, make him go back to Brunton and call for volunteers, then he will stand a chance of arresting Ling MacFarlane and his helpers, in the shack at the end of the timber valley," the woman answered.

"I have a horse at Barker's Hope, but I'm afraid it is not much good for speed. Yet riding would be quicker than walking," Caryl said with a sharp pang of regret that she had no steed at hand that was fleet of foot than the white-nosed animal.

"You must not go back to Barker's Hope for a horse

of any kind. I will tell you of a way straight out from here, and you will have plenty of time, if only you are a good walker. I've just agonized all day for a chance to save Grip Alderson, for they were good words he spoke to me last night, and I'll never forget them. I'd always heard of him as being hard and stern, but no woman could have been kinder than he was, or have had a better word to give me in my sorrow."

"Tell me the way quickly, please; I must be off if I am to reach Brunton in time," cried Caryl urgently.

"Come this way, then, and down through the field at the back. But it's a long way for a slip of a girl like you. Do you think you can do it, my dear?"

"I must do it, and God will help me," Caryl replied with a lofty faith in her heart. Then she said in a tone of distress: "But I've never even said how sorry I am for all your trouble, Mrs. Moore."

"Never mind, you've felt it, I know, and that is the same thing. Moore was a hard man to live with, but I'll miss him sorely, and want him too. God have you in His keeping, child, and may you be in time!"

Caryl waved her hand in farewell, speak she could not; then, with this benediction ringing in her ears, she ran light-footed down the field at the back of the store, and set herself more slowly to climb the long hill beyond.

CHAPTER XXV

THE GATHERING HOUR

EVEN Grip Alderson's iron frame could not endure too many days and nights without sleep, and by the afternoon of the day when he had come back from Byrnton in the morning, with the intention of returning thither at night, he was so worn out and giddy from want of rest that he lay down on a hard bench in his office at the barracks, to snatch a couple of hours of sleep before going on duty for another night of work.

But the two hours merged into three, and that in its turn became nearly four, while the hands of the harshly-ticking clock pointed to half-past seven o'clock, when there came an interruption to his slumbers in the shape of a tall, pale-faced youth who stumbled into the office with the air of one nearly distraught with excess of emotion.

"Why, Philip Rowlands, is it you? And pray, where did you spring from?" exclaimed Grip with a long, reluctant yawn, for fatigue such as his is not banished by three, or even six, hours' sleep.

"I got Paul Sutton to drive me in from Tentover, and I've come for you to tell me the truth, all the truth, mind, and with nothing held back!" the boy replied with a fierce gesture.

"About what?" demanded Grip with another long yawn.

"About my—my father." There was an unsteady

break in the boy's tone which might easily have developed into a sob if he had been a girl, and he looked fiercer than ever.

Grip got up and stretched himself, glanced at the clock, then uttered an expression of dismay. "So late, and the cars go out at eight o'clock! I tell you what it is, boy. I'm just going off to Brunton, *en route* for Barker's Hope, where Long—where your father is lying, and you can't do better than come with me, then I can tell you all about it as we go. Can you sit a horse, though?"

"Yes, I can ride a bit," Philip replied in accents of gloom; then he asked in a tone that thrilled with misery and despair: "It's true, then, that Long Jim is my father?"

"Yes, it is true. At least your sister recognized and acknowledged him as such, and she would be hardly likely to have made a mistake, I take it, about a thing like that," Grip replied. He was moving about now, making brisk preparations for his start, but Philip sat huddled up on the nearest chair inside the door, looking the picture of wretchedness.

"To think of the irony of it! After going all my life without a father at all, to have suddenly thrust upon me a man like that, whose name is a by-word among all honest people—a loafer, a tramp, nay, worse, a criminal; all but a——" But here Philip's passion choked him, and with a groan he hid his face in his hands.

Grip took three strides across the floor, and laid a firm hand on the poor boy's quivering shoulders. "Hush, lad, he's dying; he may even be dead by this time; and God is his judge, not you!" he said gravely.

But Philip only writhed under his touch, moaning

as if in pain. Then Grip asked abruptly: "Who told you about it?"

"The men were talking of it, Lester and Forbes; then I went to Mrs. Mason, and she confirmed it; so I came on here to you to make sure. For she said that you were our cousin, Helen's and mine, and I thought you would never sit down under the ban of relationship to such a person unless it were absolutely true."

Grip made a grimace. "I suppose not. But, to tell the truth, I have been so taken up with the fact that Helen and you are my cousins—and kinfolk mean a great deal to a man who has had none for so long—that I really had not paid much attention to the other side of the question. Are you coming with me, though, for we have no time to lose?"

"Yes, I'm coming; you surely didn't think I should leave Helen in the lurch, did you, and at such a time as this too?" Philip asked with an air so fierce that the other would have laughed, if he had not pitied him so much.

"Helen is a daughter worthy of the name, and if anything can help Long Jim in his extremity it will be her love and care," Grip answered gravely.

Philip moaned. "I've dreamed of my father sometimes, more often of late than before; but then he has always been a saint in heaven. Just think of the contrast to this!"

"The dream may be right after all," Grip Alderson rejoined, speaking slowly and softly, while a far-away look came into his eyes. "There was the thief on the cross, you know; he went to heaven, and your father is not worse than he was. But those cars won't wait, lad, so come along."

Not another word did Philip speak on the subject

while the train rattled and rocked on its way to Brunton, but he sat stiffly erect in a corner, his whole attitude expressive of acute suffering and heroic determination to stand by Helen, no matter what the cost might be to himself.

There were two horses waiting for them at the Brunton depot, for Grip had wired for another before leaving Lethbridge, and they mounted in the same silence in which they came.

The night was fine, but with a misty darkness caused largely by the heavy rain of the previous night. There would be a moon later, but it was not due for some hours yet.

The first few miles of level ground were gone over at a brisk pace, and the horses had dropped into a walk to climb the steep rise where the hill-country began, when a voice hailed them out of the gloom on the side of the track.

"Is that you, Mr. Alderson?"

Grip started as if he had unexpectedly received an electric shock. He had been half-dozing on his saddle, for his tiredness was with him still, but he would have known that voice if he had heard it anywhere, only for the moment he imagined he must be dreaming.

"Miss Mason!" he exclaimed sharply, whilst Philip uttered an ejaculation of extreme astonishment, and a figure at the same moment emerged from the shadowy gloom and came hurrying towards them.

"Oh, I am so thankful to be in time!" Caryl cried with a wavering unsteadiness of voice which proclaimed her strength nearly spent. "I feared that you must have passed already before I reached this road, so I was hurrying back to Brunton to call for volunteers to come to your help," she said, her tone

hurried and panting, her breath coming in little gasps, for not yet could she believe that her effort to save Grip's life had been successful.

"Here, sit down a few minutes and rest, while you tell us what is the matter, and why you are roaming about in this fashion at night," he said, unhooking his thick riding-cape and spreading it upon the ground for her to sit upon.

She sat down with a sigh of thankfulness, for her feet were sore. She had lost one shoe and was in a hopelessly draggled condition from wading through little streams and marshy places; but she was in time, and that was compensation enough for all that she had gone through.

"You must not go on, but back to Brunton for volunteers," she panted, pouring out the story which Mrs. Moore had told her of the attempt on his life which was to be made that night in the timber valley.

"Philip can go back and call up the fire-guard while I put you on my horse and take you back to Barker's Hope by a roundabout way, unless, indeed, you would prefer to go on to Brunton," Grip said with a sudden softening in his voice.

"No, no, I must go back to Helen!" she said hurriedly. "Just think of the hours since I went away, and she will be wild with apprehension on my account. But you must not come; indeed you must not, for this is a chance that you may not have for a long time of securing Ling as a prisoner. Philip shall go with me back by the roundabout way that I came, and you shall go and get help. But, oh! be careful, I beg of you, for Ling is not alone, and he and his helpers are fully armed."

Grip hesitated a moment, torn in two between his duty, which would send him back to Brunton for the fire-guard, and his inclination, which kept him at Caryl's side. But it was only for a moment, for he had put duty first too long to shirk it now, however sweet and subtle the temptation might be.

"I will be careful," he answered; and then, as she rose to her feet, he caught her hands in a close grasp, saying in a low tone, as he turned his back on Philip, who was slowly dismounting: "My life will have a new value in my eyes henceforth, because of what you have done for me to-night."

"I—I was glad to do it, only I was afraid of being too late, and the way was so terribly long!" she faltered.

"Poor child!" he said, only there was more elation than pity in his tone. And when he swung her on to the horse from which Philip had dismounted, there was a certain indefinable sense of possession in his touch which thrilled her with a joy so keen that it was all but a pain. She was so worn out with all that she had gone through as to be not quite mistress of herself to-night, and the longing to break down and cry from sheer exhaustion was almost more than she could withstand.

"I hate to have you go tracking through the hills at this time of night with no stronger escort than Philip. If I could only come with you and see you in safety, before my part of the play began, it would not be so bad," he said, hesitating even now.

Caryl was opening her lips to reply when suddenly rifle-shots rang out not far away, then hoarse cries, more shots, and silence.

For a few minutes they maintained an aghast silence,

wondering what it all could mean. Then Grip Alderson said curtly: "That settles it. I shall go to Barker's Hope with you and Philip, call out the miners to help me, and fall upon Ling from that side. It will be nearly as quick too, if we go by the cut rocks."

"That is the way Mrs. Moore told me to come, but I think I must have missed it, for certainly I saw nothing to answer to her description of them," Caryl said as, in obedience to instructions, Philip mounted the other horse, and Grip, taking the bridle of the animal on which she was perched, turned abruptly off the track, leading it down a slope so steep that it was all she could do to keep from slipping off the awkward, uncomfortable saddle.


"Ah! I know the way you must have taken. There were two or three little streams, and a long stretch of marshy ground—a really dangerous place after a rain; and last night it poured in torrents up here in the hills. It is a long way too—quite ten miles, I should say,—and I wonder that you were able to do it in the time."

"I ran when I could," Caryl answered, then was silent for a time, devoting her energies to hanging on, as the horse, having got to the bottom of the sharp descent, commenced an upward scramble almost as steep as the one it had just come down.

"It is a good thing that the moon won't be up for nearly another hour, since the darkness will enable us to pass the timber valley quite a mile nearer than if it were light enough for us to be seen," he said, as he deftly guided the horse over the broken ground.

"Do you know the way in the dark?" she asked in some surprise.

"I think I could go almost anywhere about the Milk River Ridge in the dark. You see, I have been com-



pelled to explore this part of the country so thoroughly, looking after law-breakers of one sort and another, for it seems to be a first instinct with some sorts of transgressors to make for the nearest bit of hill-country, and entrench themselves there against all comers," he answered, as they went slowly along the top of a ridge, hidden by the kindly dark, which also veiled from the eyes of Caryl and Philip the very dangerous bit of ground they were passing over.

To Caryl, used to the flats of Tentover and the gently-rolling hills of the ranges, there was something absolutely dreadful in these abrupt ascents and descents, but she said nothing, only held on as best she could, thankful for the screening of the darkness.

"Where are we now?" she asked, after a long silence, as the horses by their quickened progress appeared to be once more on a familiar path.

"Within a mile of Barker's Hope, and the timber valley is safely in our rear. Do you see that light yonder? The moon is coming up, and we shall finish our journey with ease," Grip replied; then, turning to Philip, asked how he fared.

"Oh, I am still sticking on, which is all that can be said!" he replied, but his tone was so despairing and bitter that neither Caryl nor Grip spoke to him again.

A white flood of moonlight poured down on the little hut at Barker's Hope when they rode up to the door, revealing the figure of Helen standing by the door.

"Oh, Caryl!" she cried, "how thankful I am to see you! I have been so troubled about you, dear, and it is nearly midnight now!"

"I could not help it," Caryl answered, and was

about to launch into some sort of an explanation of her absence, when Philip slid from his horse and came round to his sister's side.

"Philip!" she exclaimed in a startled tone. "Oh, Philip, why have you come?"

"We've mostly shared things, Nell—both bitter and sweet,—so I've come to share this," he said, putting his arm round her in a protecting fashion, though in everything, saving perhaps endurance, she was so much the stronger of the two.

"Ah, Philip!" she answered, resting her head against his shoulder, whilst the slow tears of a natural sorrow rolled down her cheeks, "this is both bitter and sweet; but you have come too late, our father died an hour ago."

"And you were alone, poor Nell!" A sudden break of tenderness came into the boy's despairing tones, and as he clasped her closer in his arms, he realized something of what she must have gone through.

"I was not afraid to be alone, and he was so glad to have me!" she murmured.

The other two had drawn aside, leaving brother and sister to talk alone, and Grip Alderson was speaking of what must be immediately done.

"I shall take both horses and ride down the valley to the huts by the workings. I can find some men there to help me, but I fear there is no woman to be found nearer than Brunton to come to your assistance here," he said with a movement of his head towards the room where Long Jim lay in his last sleep.

"Do not trouble about us," she answered softly; "but be careful, for remember those men are armed."

"So am I," he said a little grimly. "But from the sound of that firing, and those cries we heard at the

place where you met us, I should fancy that my would-be destroyers were having a quarrel amongst themselves, in which case it is highly probable they will do each other some damage, and so save the authorities trouble."

He moved away as he spoke, lifting his cap in farewell; then, moved by a sudden impulse, he came swiftly back to her side, and gathered her hands in his.

"I shall be back at dawn—if I live. But won't you give me a good word to go with?" he asked.

"What good word do you want?" Her voice was steady enough, but her gaze was on the ground, and he could see but little of her face.

"I am in no way worthy, either in purse. position, or anything else," he said humbly, "but will you tell me that I may ask your father for you?"

"Yes, if you like," she said with a flutter of happiness thrilling her tones, and, with the words ringing in his ears, he mounted his horse and rode away.

CHAPTER XXVI

A STRANGE HIDING-PLACE

SHORTLY after morning broke, Caryl was in the outer room of the hut sorting and arranging the various articles which she had brought to Barker's Hope the day before in her father's old pig-skin bag. On a rough couch in the corner, formed by a rug spread over two planks, Helen lay fast asleep, worn out with her long vigils, whilst Philip cowered over a fire he had lighted in the stove which stood in the corner by the outer door, for the hour of dawning was chilly in the hills, and he too was spent by the strain of all he had gone through, although in his case sleep was at present an impossibility.

If Caryl was tired she did not look it, as, having taken all the things out of the bag, she turned it upside down to shake out some cork dust which had leaked into the bag from the box in which the grapes had been packed.

The shaking brought out something else too; a long blue envelope of an unmistakably legal aspect slid out through the hole in the lining, where Helen had made the rent in extracting the box of grapes, and fell to the ground.

"Now what is that, I wonder?" she said, stooping down and picking up the envelope.

It was unfastened and unaddressed, and, being gifted

with quite an average amount of curiosity, she drew out the enclosures and proceeded to examine them.

A minute later she cried out so sharply that Helen started from her slumber in a great panic, and Philip jumped up, wondering what was the matter.

"What is it?" gasped Helen.

"It is Giles Harper's missing will," exclaimed Caryl in a tone of positive awe, "and it has lain hidden in the lining of this old bag all these years! The old man must have put it in himself, and by some blunder slipped it in through a hole in the lining. See, there is a place where a long rent has been mended, and there is the other slit where it dropped out again. Here is a letter to my father, too, which explains the whole mystery." As she spoke she held a sheet of paper towards them, yellow with age, and whereon the sprawling writing was already growing faint and dim.

"Dear Reuben" (so ran the letter), "on second thoughts I have made up my mind to entrust the custody of my will to you; but, as you will most likely refuse to accept the charge, I shall put it in your bag myself, saying nothing about it; and I think you like me too well to trouble me by sending it back to me.

"I have a prevision that in my old age I shall be witless and incapable of judgment, as many aged people are, and so I am laying on you a charge not to let my money be wasted in dissolute living if you can help it. And so I charge you that if you think Fanny's husband is like to make ducks and drakes of my hard-earned wealth, then destroy my will and let it be thought I have died intestate; for I had rather that all my kin should have a little, and the law a

great deal, than that handsome Francis James Rowlands should waste it all at cards. Your old friend GILES HARPER."

For a moment, after reading that letter from the past, the group of three stood looking at each other in an awed silence that was presently broken by Helen:

"It is like the finger of Divine Providence. For if Mr. Mason had known that he held that will, he must have destroyed it in obedience to the old man's command, because of my father's wild life. But it was safely hidden, and found at the right time."

"What a strange, strange thing! and now you and Philip will have all the money and be rich, I suppose?" Caryl said as she turned to read the letter again.

"Not all. We share, of course, equally with Grip Alderson; that is, the money will be divided in halves. He will take one half, whilst Philip and I share the other," replied Helen, who was reading the provisions of the will which had been so long and strangely hidden.

At the mention of Grip, Caryl's head went up with a jerk, whilst her cheeks flushed rosy red; but at the same moment there came the sound of trampling hoofs outside, and Grip himself rode up to the door, accompanied by the manager of works, mounted on the other horse.

"We have had a lost journey after all, for the birds were flown when we got to the timber valley, though we found traces of their recent presence there," he said in answer to Caryl's enquiry; and he did not tell her until some time afterwards that a careful examination of the timber valley had led to the discovery of the dead body of Ling MacFarlane, who had been

shot through the heart, though it was never discovered who had done the deed.

Long Jim was laid to rest in a little graveyard about five miles from Barker's Hope, Helen and Philip standing side by side at the grave, their heads bowed with the sorrow of their bitter regret for the life that had been so wasted and misspent. Yet even their natural grief was streaked with the light of hope, since their father had died a penitent man, his heart won and softened by his daughter's love.

"If only you had told me, Nell, and given me the chance of sharing the trouble!" Philip said as the brother and sister turned away from the grave when the funeral was over.

"I did not like to darken your life with such a shadow at first, and afterwards I was afraid that you would not be able to love him," Helen answered with a sob catching her voice as she sent a backward look towards the far corner of the little burial-ground where her father was lying.

"Perhaps I should not. I know I felt bad enough when I heard about it; but afterwards, when I got here, I was sorry that I was too late," he said jerkily.

Helen put out her hand and squeezed his, but she did not speak, for words were not easy just then, although the thought that his sympathy was with her in this thing also brought no little comfort to her aching heart.

Caryl had stayed at Barker's Hope until the funeral, and when this was over they all went back to Lethbridge together, where they were met by Grip Alderson, who drove them out to Tentover in a police wagon.

Mr. Mason's astonishment was very great when he heard of the finding of the missing will in the old pig-skin bag.

"The hand of the Lord was in it," he said reverently. "For had I known of the whereabouts of the will I must have destroyed it. Truly there is no such thing as chance in the world, but events and circumstances fit into each other as the Almighty Father meant they should."

"I have the more courage to ask you for Caryl now, sir, seeing that a part of that money is coming to me, and I shall have the wherewithal to keep my wife according to my own ideas of fitness," said Grip Alderson later on, when he found the invalid master of Tentover alone for a few minutes.

"I would rather give her to you than to anyone, though it will be a wrench in any case," Mr. Mason said with a quaver in his tone. "And I would not have said you nay if you had only your pay to depend upon, for an honest heart is worth more than a full purse. But for all that I am glad you have the money, as well as your upright character, and I hope you will both be as happy as you deserve to be."

The little cabin by the flume was given up to the use of stockmen after Helen went to live in Toronto as the wife of Eremus Kaye, for Philip took up his residence at Tentover, becoming Mr. Mason's right-hand helper, and gaining new strength and vigour from the healthy open-air life in the dry climate of the ranges.

Mrs. Mason grew reconciled to Caryl's choice of a husband, after a time, and spent some months in every year staying with Helen in Toronto.

There was still Betty's possible marriage to look forward to and plan for. But Betty was at heart equally as much a daughter of the ranges as her sister, and it seemed more than likely that she too would elect to spend her life in the wide and open country when her time for choice came.

